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INTERPRETATION

IN THE

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Barry Mackintosh

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INTERPRETATION IN THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Barry Mackintosh

History Division
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

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PREFACE

"Although the National Park Service did not invent interpretation, that organization was largely responsible for the broad public recognition of its values in developing understanding and appreciation of nature and history.... The National Park Service effectively modified formal educational processes to arouse the latent interests and desires of park visitors, and, as a result of ever-increasing numbers of such visitors over the years, interpretation has become practically a household word."

So wrote C. Frank Brockman, retired from a long career at Mount Rainier National Park, in the January 1978 Journal of Forest History. Brockman's excellent article, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation through World War II," reflected his background and interests as a naturalist. The present account, reflecting its author's background as a park historian, is correspondingly weighted toward historical interpretation. By no means does it pretend to tell the entire story. Instead it focuses on guiding concepts, trends, special emphases, and problem areas that have most concerned those responsible for interpretation.

Interpreters are a critical lot, seldom hesitant to note when their performance falls short of the ideal. From this history, present and future interpreters will be reminded that most of the problems they face have precedents. Knowing this may not solve the problems, but it should help to put them in perspective.

I am indebted to several Service employees and retirees for their recollections and observations, particularly Roy Appleman, Ed Bearss,

READEX FICHE best copy available

Dave Dame, Bill Dunmire, Vince Gleason, Roy Graybill, Alan Kent, Steve Lewis, Ray Nelson, Russ Olsen, Harry Pfanz, Tom Ritter, and Bob Utley. I was fortunate to obtain a partial draft of Ralph Lewis's forthcoming history of the NPS museum function, which will cover that topic much more fully than I have done. Dave Nathanson and Ruthanne Heriot made available the excellent files of the National Park Service History Collection at Harpers Ferry, and Tom DuRant assisted with the photographs. Unfortunately, the time allotted to the project did not permit me to respond to all the good advice received and expand this overview into something more comprehensive. As reviewers will note, the definitive history of National Park Service interpretation remains to be written.

Barry Mackintosh
April 1986

ORIGINS

Before the National Park Service

Well before some of America's most spectacular natural places were reserved as national parklands in the last half of the 19th century, persons seeking adventure and inspiration visited them. Some of these pre-park visitors found the wild beauties of these lands sufficient to occupy their attention. Others, supplementing aesthetic appreciation with scientific curiosity, sought to understand and explain the remarkable natural phenomena they encountered.

Among the latter was John Muir. In 1871, while living and working near Yosemite Valley, Muir recorded in his notebook, "I'll interpret the rocks, learn the language of flood, storm and the avalanche. I'll acquaint myself with the glaciers and wild gardens, and get as near the heart of the world as I can." Muir's use here of "interpret" has been cited as the first precedent for its later adoption by the National Park Service,[1] although the context suggests an effort more toward understanding than communication.

Muir did communicate the natural values of the Sierra eloquently through his writings. Other forerunners of written park interpretation include The Yosemite Guide-Book of 1869 by J. D. Whitney, California State Geologist, and In the Heart of the Sierras by James Mason Hutchings, a former Yosemite Valley hotel operator, published in 1886.

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[1]Quotation from Linnie Marsh Wolfe, Son of the Wilderness: The Life of John Muir (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1945), p. 144; C. Frank Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation through World War II," Journal of Forest History, January 1978, p. 26.

After the U.S. Army assumed protection duties in Yellowstone National Park in 1886, some of the soldiers stationed in the Upper Geyser Basin undertook to explain thermal features to visitors. These early interpretive "cone talks" owed little to scientific knowledge, but they were no worse than the explanations forthcoming from commercial sources in the park. According to Robert Shankland:

> In the early days at Yellowstone, the tourist who neglected to stuff himself in advance at the encyclopedias was liable to have a dark time of it among the volcanic phenomena. There was little on-the-spot enlightenment. Most stagecoach drivers liked to descant to the customers, but in a vein of bold invention. A few voluble guides worked out of the hotels; they cruelly punished the natural sciences. Under the regulations the guides could charge no fees. They did well, however, on tips, which they induced by a classic method: every audience harbored an unacknowledged accomplice, who at the end of a guide's remarks voiced resounding appreciation and, with a strong look around, extended a generous cash award.[2]

After the turn of the century some improvement in the quality of public presentations was evident. The Wylie Camping Company, which housed Yellowstone visitors in tents, recruited teachers who gave lectures and campfire programs while performing other duties. Elsewhere, the trend was illustrated in and near the future Rocky Mountain National Park. Enos Mills, who established Longs Peak Inn near Estes Park, Colorado, in 1901, was an American pioneer in "nature guiding." While working for establishment of the national park--achieved in 1915--Mills led and promoted guided hikes through the area aimed at appreciation of its natural values.[3]

In 1905 Frank Pinkley, custodian of the Casa Grande Ruin Reservation

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[2]Aubrey L. Haines, The Yellowstone Story (2 vols.; Yellowstone National Park: Yellowstone Library and Museum Association, 1977), 2: 303; Shankland, Steve Mather of the National Parks (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), p. 257.

[3]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 28.

(later Casa Grande National Monument) in Arizona Territory, pioneered another category of interpretation when he assembled a sampling of prehistoric artifacts recovered from archeological excavation in the ruin. Pinkley's display has been called the forerunner of national park museum exhibits.[4] The year before, 1st Lt. Henry F. Pipes, a surgeon with the 9th Cavalry stationed in Yosemite National Park, laid out paths and labeled 36 species of plants near Wawona as part of an arboretum. This natural exhibit was abandoned after it was discovered to lie on private land, and the military superintendent's plan for an adjoining museum and library building was not realized. By 1915 Yosemite did have what it called a museum, in the form of a flora and fauna specimen collection exhibited in the headquarters building.[5]

Of the several forms of early park explanatory media, publications reached the largest audience. In 1911 Laurence F. Schmeckebier, the Department of the Interior's clerk in charge of publications, asked the superintendents of the larger parks to submit material for a series of handbooks containing basic information on access, accommodations, and the like. A second handbook series promoted by Schmeckebier and written by Smithsonian Institution and U.S. Geological Survey scientists interpreted major park features. Booklets included The Secret of the Big Trees: Yosemite, Sequoia, and General Grant National Parks (1913) by

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[4]Ned J. Burns, Field Manual for Museums (Washington: National Park Service, 1941), p. 4.

[5]U.S. Department of the Interior, Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1904 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), pp. 387, 397; Burns, Field Manual for Museums, p. 4; U.S. Department of the Interior, Annual Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 1915 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1915), pp. 814-15.

Ellsworth Huntington, Origin of Scenic Features of Glacier National Park (1914) by M. R. Campbell, Mount Rainier and Its Glaciers (1914) by F. E. Matthes, and Fossil Forests of Yellowstone National Park (1914) by F. H. Knowlton. In a 1912 article in Popular Science Monthly, "The National Parks from the Educational and Scientific Side," Schmeckebier publicized the values forthcoming from popular study and professional research.[6]

Schmeckebier's activities were part of an Interior Department effort to build popular support for the national parks and political support for creation of a new bureau within the department to manage them. In 1915 Stephen T. Mather began to advance these objectives full time as special assistant to the Secretary of the Interior for national parks. Mather hired Robert Sterling Yard, a former colleague on the New York Sun, to handle park publicity (personally paying his $5,000 salary). They tied their campaign to the contemporary "See America First" movement, aimed at encouraging affluent vacationers to spend their dollars at home rather than abroad.

Yard's first product was The National Parks Portfolio, financed with $43,000 contributed by 17 western railroads profiting from park tourism. Two hundred seventy-five thousand copies of this lavishly illustrated publication were printed in June 1916 and distributed free to prominent Americans, including members of Congress. "It is the destiny of the national parks, if wisely controlled, to become the public laboratories of nature study for the Nation," Secretary of the Interior Franklin K.

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[6]Schmeckebier, "Publicity in its Relation to National Parks," Proceedings of the National Park Conference Held at the Yellowstone National Park, September 11 and 12, 1911 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1912), pp. 105-06; Shankland, Steve Mather of the National Parks, pp. 59, 257-58.

Lane wrote in its introduction.[7] Thus, while the promotion was grounded in economic and political considerations, it advanced the prospect of an overriding educational purpose for the parks.

The Park Service Assumes Responsibility

Doubtless influenced by the publicity campaign, Congress passed the National Park Service bill in August 1916, and the new bureau began operating the following year with Mather as director and Horace M. Albright as his assistant. Heavy publicity to promote and aid park tourism--and thereby to stimulate increased Park Service appropriations--continued under Yard, who became chief of the Service's "educational division" (a nonofficial capacity in which Mather continued to pay his salary). Yard turned out a second edition of The National Parks Portfolio in 1917 with added sections on Hot Springs and the lesser parks and monuments, omitted from the original publication. The Service also disseminated more than 128,000 park circulars, 83,000 automobile guide maps, and 117,000 pamphlets titled "Glimpses of Our National Parks" that year and circulated 348,000 feet of motion picture film to schools, churches, and other organizations.[8]

A letter from Secretary Lane to Director Mather in May 1918--drafted by Horace Albright--constituted the Service's first administrative policy statement. It reiterated the concept of the parks as educational media:

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[7]Yard, The National Parks Portfolio (Washington, Department of the Interior, 1916); U.S. Department of the Interior, Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1917 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), 1: 792.

[8]U.S. Department of the Interior, Reports...for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1917, 1: 792-93.

> The educational, as well as the recreational, use of the national parks should be encouraged in every practicable way. University and high-school classes in science will find special facilities for their vacation period studies. Museums containing specimens of wild flowers, shrubs, and trees and mounted animals, birds, and fish native to the parks, and other exhibits of this character, will be established as authorized.[9]

Despite this high-level expression of support, the idea of the Park Service being in the education business--beyond dispensing basic tourist information--was not widely applauded. Yard later recalled the obstacles he faced during the bureau's first years:

> Educational promotion wasn't much of a success at first. No one in Washington took any interest in it except Mr. Mather, spasmodically; Congressmen smiled over it; and with a very few exceptions the concessioners opposed it. Somebody politically influential on the Pacific Coast slammed the whole idea of education in national parks by letter to his Senator who called up Secretary Lane about it, and Lane phoned down to Mather that he'd better go slow on that unpopular kind of stuff. Thus the cause passed under a heavy cloud just as things were beginning to look hopeful. But I still kept my title, and hammered away as inconspicuously as possible.[10]

With Congress reluctant to support park educational activities, outside sponsorship would play a large role during the first decade of Park Service operation. Charles D. Wolcott, secretary of the Smithsonian, organized a National Parks Educational Committee in 1918. With Mather's help, it spawned the National Parks Association in May 1919. Yard moved over to become executive secretary of the association, among whose purposes were "to interpret the natural sciences which are illustrated in the scenic features, flora and fauna of the national parks and monuments, and to circulate popular information concerning them in text and picture,"

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[9]Letter of May 13, 1918, reproduced in Administrative Policies for Natural Areas of the National Park System (Washington: National Park Service, 1970), p. 70.

[10]Letter to Harold C. Bryant, June 24, 1931, History of Interpretation files, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry, W. Va. (hereinafter cited as NPSHC).

and "to encourage the popular study of the history, exploration, tradition, and folk lore of the national parks and monuments."[11]

In the parks themselves, most educational or interpretive programs were undertaken or aided by outside parties. In 1917 Rocky Mountain National Park examined and licensed young women as nature guides; the women were employed by local hotels. Mesa Verde National Park that year rehabilitated a ranger station for museum purposes and in 1918 installed five cases of excavated artifacts and photo enlargements of the park's ruins. There J. Walter Fewkes, a Smithsonian archeologist, lectured on his work in the park. The University of California extension division inaugurated a lecture series in memory of Professor Joseph LeConte at Yosemite in 1919 and continued it through 1923. Speakers the first summer included Professor Willis L. Jepson of the university on botany; William Frederic Bade, John Muir's literary executor, on Muir; Professor A. L. Kroeber of the university on local Indians; and Francois Emile Matthes of the U.S. Geological Survey on geology. Matthes stayed in the park, giving additional talks in the public camps and at Sierra Club campfires.[12]

Notwithstanding precedents elsewhere, the first reasonably comprehensive interpretive programs directed by the Park Service blossomed at both Yosemite and Yellowstone in 1920. Visiting Fallen Leaf Lake in the Tahoe

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[11]U.S. Department of the Interior, Reports of the Department of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1919 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1919, 1: 946.

[12]Lloyd K. Musselman, Rocky Mountain National Park Administrative History, 1915-1965 (Washington: National Park Service, 1971), pp. 147-48; Ricardo Torres-Reyes, Mesa Verde National Park: An Administrative History, 1906-1970 (Washington: National Park Service, 1970), p. 94; U.S. Department of the Interior, Reports...for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1919, 1: 943-44.

region the year before, Mather had been impressed with a program of nature guiding and evening lectures conducted by Professor Loye Holmes Miller of the University of California at Los Angeles and Dr. Harold C. Bryant, educational director of the California Fish and Game Commission. Mather persuaded Miller and Bryant to transfer their activities to Yosemite the following summer. There Bryant organized and directed the Yosemite Free Nature Guide Service. The program included daily guided hikes, evening campfire talks, and lectures at Camp Curry illustrated by motion pictures. "The response has been so great that we are sure there will be sufficient demand not only to continue the work in Yosemite National Park but to extend it to other parks," Bryant reported of the first season's activity.[13] At Yellowstone, Superintendent Horace M. Albright made Ranger Milton P. Skinner the Service's first officially designated park naturalist. Employed earlier by the Yellowstone Park Association, Skinner had long studied the park's natural features and advocated an educational service. With two seasonal rangers hired by Albright for interpretation, he now conducted field trips, gave lectures, and prepared natural history bulletins for posting in the park.[14]

Yosemite and Yellowstone simultaneously advanced in museum development. Ranger Ansel F. Hall organized the Yosemite Museum Association in 1920 to plan and raise funds for a new park museum. The next year he began converting the former studio of artist Chris Jorgensen to museum

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[13]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 29; Report of the Director of the National Park Service, in U.S. Department of the Interior, Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1920 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1920), 1: 113, 254, 256.

[14]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," pp. 30-31.

use. Containing six rooms designated for history, ethnology, geology, natural history, botany, and trees, it featured a scale model of Yosemite Valley built by Hall and mounted birds and mammals prepared by Chief Ranger Forest S. Townsley. The museum opened in June 1922. Milton Skinner started Yellowstone's park museum in 1920 in a former bachelor officers' quarters at Mammoth Hot Springs (the building still functions as a museum there). His exhibits included mammal specimens prepared by Chief Ranger Sam T. Woodring.[15]

Director Mather's 1920 annual report called for "the early establishment of adequate museums in every one of our parks" for exhibiting regional flora, fauna, and minerals.[16] Because appropriated funds for park museums and related programs were not forthcoming, it became customary to seek outside support. The case of Yosemite exemplifies this pattern.

Ansel Hall met Chauncey J. Hamlin, vice president and later president of the American Association of Museums, in 1921 and impressed him with the need for a better park museum. Hamlin established and chaired the AAM Committee on Museums in National Parks (later the Committee on Outdoor Education), which included such long-time park supporters as Hermon C. Bumpus, John C. Merriam, and Clark Wissler. The committee sought "establishment of small natural-history museums in a number of the larger parks." Through its efforts, the AAM obtained a $70,500 grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in 1924 to build and equip a permanent Yosemite museum. Hall, who had become chief naturalist of the National

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[15]Burns, Field Manual for Museums, p. 18; Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," pp. 31-32.

[16]U.S. Department of the Interior, Annual Report...for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1920, 1: 59.

Park Service the year before, was appointed executive agent of the AAM for the new museum (temporarily leaving the Park Service payroll). Carl P. Russell, Hall's successor as park naturalist, simultaneously replaced the Yosemite Museum Association with the Yosemite Natural History Association, broadened to promote a range of related programs. In addition to supporting development of the museum, it would gather and disseminate information on the park's natural and human history, contribute to the educational activities of the Yosemite Nature Guide Service, promote scientific investigation, maintain a library, study and preserve the customs and legends of the remaining Indians of the region, and publish Yosemite Nature Notes in cooperation with the Park Service.[17]

Hermon C. Bumpus, who had been first director of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, had strong ideas about park museums and took virtual command of the Yosemite project. In addition to the museum planned for Yosemite Valley, he promoted a "focal point" lookout facility at Glacier Point as best representing what park museums should be about:

> The controlling fact governing the development of educational work in the national parks is that within these reservations multitudes are brought directly in contact with striking examples of Nature's handicraft. To lead these people away from direct contact with Nature...is contrary to the spirit of the enterprise. The real museum is outside the walls of the building and the purpose of the museum work is to render the out-of-doors intelligible. It is out of this conception that a smaller specialized museum, the trailside museum, takes its origin.[18]

Architect Herbert Maier, who would have a long career in Park Service construction and management, designed both structures. The Glacier Point

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[17]Ralph Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service," draft manuscript, 1983, p. 41; Burns, Field Manual for Museums, p. 18.

[18]Bumpus quote in H. C. Bumpus, Jr., Hermon Carey Bumpus, Yankee Naturalist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1947), p. 104.

lookout was completed in 1925. The Yosemite Valley museum was finished in 1926 and served as park interpretive headquarters until 1968, when it was incorporated in an expanded visitor center.

The AAM also played an active role in museum development at Grand Canyon and Yellowstone national parks during the 1920s. Another grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial in 1926 funded the observation station and museum overlooking the Grand Canyon at Yavapai Point. Ansel Hall continued in AAM employ on the project, and John C. Merriam--formerly professor of paleontology at Berkeley, later head of the Carnegie Institution of Washington--spearheaded it for the park museum committee. Herbert Maier again drew the plans. When the Rockefeller money ran out, Merriam personally paid for one of the large windows and got a $3,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York to finish the work. The structure opened in 1930.[19]

Yellowstone was beneficiary of a $112,000 grant from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial for museum development in 1928. Over the objections of Park Naturalist Dorr G. Yeager, Hermon Bumpus decided upon small "focal point" museums at Old Faithful, Madison Junction, and Norris Geyser Basin rather than a single, major one. These structures, one at Fishing Bridge, and a "trailside shrine" exhibit at Obsidian Cliff were completed to Herbert Maier's designs between 1928 and 1931.[20]

In the fall of 1928 Bumpus arranged an extensive tour of American museums for Yosemite's Carl Russell, seeking to develop him as a museum professional within the Park Service. The next year Russell was promoted

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[19]Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service," p. 53.

[20]Ibid., p. 54.

to a new position of field naturalist specializing in exhibit planning and preparation for the parks. In this capacity, assisted by Dorr Yeager, Russell took charge of the exhibits and curation for the new Yellowstone museums. Among the interpretive devices he inherited were two portable working models of geysers, erupting to a height of 2-1/2 feet each minute, built for Yellowstone by the Service's Education Division in 1926.[21]

Mesa Verde and Lassen Volcanic national parks were among other areas benefiting from private philanthropy in museum development during the 1920s. Superintendent and Mrs. Jesse L. Nusbaum of Mesa Verde persuaded Stella M. Leviston of San Francisco and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., to contribute $5,000 each for a new museum there, built between 1923 and 1925. In 1929 the Loomis Memorial Museum, previously built by the Loomis family on adjacent land, was donated to Lassen. Not until 1930 did federal money fund a park museum: the Sinnott Memorial, a stone observation station on the edge of Crater Lake, honoring the late Rep. Nicholas J. Sinnott of Oregon. Even then, the Carnegie Foundation paid for its exhibits and equipment. An information station-museum near Rocky Mountain National Park headquarters was jointly funded in this manner the following year.[22]

Interpretation Institutionalized

Other national parks were not long in emulating the interpretive lectures, guided hikes, publications, and exhibits pioneered at Yosemite,

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[21]Report of the Education Division, 1926, NPSHC.

[22]Torres-Reyes, Mesa Verde National Park, pp. 179-85; Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 41.

Yellowstone, and Mesa Verde. In 1921 Rocky Mountain National Park established an information office. Mount Rainier National Park hired Charles Landes, a Seattle biology teacher, as seasonal ranger-naturalist; he would return for nearly 20 summers. At Glacier National Park a local naturalist began a nature guide service that year under National Park Service permit, charging a fee. He was replaced in 1922 by a free program staffed by professors from Montana State College. At Sequoia National Park U.S. Commissioner Walter Fry, formerly park superintendent, began issuing nature bulletins in 1922. A year later he formed the Sequoia Nature Guide Service, established a tent museum, and began nature walks. Grand Canyon National Park opened an information room in 1922, and during the next two years Chief Clerk Michael J. Harrison gave nature talks at El Tovar Hotel. In 1925 Angus M. Woodbury started as seasonal naturalist at Zion National Park and Fred H. Kiser, park photograper at Crater Lake, gave the first interpretive lectures there.[23]

To support and encourage these park programs, Director Mather made Ansel Hall chief naturalist of the National Park Service in 1923. Organizationally, Hall became chief of the Service's Education Division, headquartered at the University of California at Berkeley with the forestry school there. At the Eighth National Park Conference, held at Mesa Verde in October 1925, Mather voiced strong support for interpretation and made the Education Division one of three equal units--with Landscape Architecture and Engineering--in the Service organization.[24]

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[23]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," pp. 33-34.

[24]Ibid., pp. 32, 37; Russ Olsen, Administrative History: Organizational Structures of the National Park Service, 1917 to 1985 (Washington: National Park Service, 1985).

The functions of the Education Division included overseeing and setting standards for the hiring of park naturalists. In 1926 Hall prepared an information sheet and application blank to send the numerous aspirants for naturalist positions. The information sheet stressed the difficult requirements of the job:

> The duties of Ranger Naturalist require a full day's work each day--work entailing continual contact with the public. If you are not absolutely certain that you can maintain an attitude of enthusiasm and courtesy, please do not apply for work of this sort....
>
> A Ranger Naturalist may have to talk to 1500 to 2000 persons; his lectures may be a part of a general entertainment program where his competitors will be Jazz music, comedy skits, or other such forms of amusement....

"This should automatically weed out fully 95% of the unfit applicants, most of whom are absolutely ignorant of the duties of the ranger naturalists and are merely looking for a pleasant vacation in one of the parks," Hall wrote Horace Albright.[25]

To better train naturalists for positions in and outside the parks, Harold Bryant--still with the California Fish and Game Commission--cooperated with the National Park Service to found the Yosemite School of Field Natural History in 1925. The seven-week summer course was limited to 20 students who had spent at least two years in college. Sixty percent of the program was devoted to field observation and identification, distinguishing it from typical academic courses in the natural sciences. Graduates, who were awarded certificates, went to parks and summer camps throughout the country. Bryant and Yosemite naturalists regularly taught the popular course. Many seasonal and permanent Service naturalists were trained at the school, which operated each summer (the war years excepted)

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[25]Letter with enclosures, Feb. 17, 1926, NPSHC.

until 1953.[26]

At Mather's instigation, Secretary of the Interior Roy O. West appointed the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks in 1928. Chaired by John C. Merriam, it included Hermon C. Bumpus, Frank Oastler, Vernon Kellogg, and Harold Bryant. The committee recommended a permanent educational advisory board, established the next year with Merriam, Bumpus, Oastler, Wallace W. Atwood, Clark Wissler, and Isaiah Bowman as members. It also urged appointment of a Park Service education chief headquartered in Washington. This recommendation was carried out in 1930, when Harold Bryant was made assistant director of the Service in charge of the new Branch of Research and Education. Ansel Hall remained in Berkeley, under Bryant, as head of the retitled Field Division of Education and Forestry for several years.[27]

Although education/interpretation thus attained high status in the Park Service organization and benefited from the Service's first formal training program, the function and its practitioners were still not universally accepted by park superintendents and rangers. Some of the early naturalist appointees were academically trained scientists who could not adapt to field work with park visitors; such misfits at Yellowstone and Lassen had to be dismissed.[28] Despite the Yosemite school, persons with

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[26]Harold C. Bryant, Nature Guiding (Washington: American Nature Association, 1925); Harold C. Bryant and Wallace W. Atwood, Jr., Research and Education in the National Parks (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), pp. 37-38; Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 35.

[27]Reports with Recommendations from the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks, January 9, 1929, and November 27, 1929 (n.p., n.d.).

[28]Harold C. Bryant interview by S. Herbert Evison, Mar. 18, 1962, NPSHC.

solid qualifications and training for interpretive duties were not plentiful, and programs were sometimes amateurish. In 1978 C. Frank Brockman, hired as a Mount Rainier naturalist 50 years before, recalled that among rangers, "interest in natural history was often associated with qualities lacking in 'he-men.'" Nor were park naturalists widely appreciated by academics. As Brockman remembered it:

> Science had not gained the status typical of recent years, and early Park Service naturalists were often considered to be impractical "scientists." Conversely, true scientists of that time, though respecting the zeal and dedication of park naturalists, were well aware of their limited scientific backgrounds. So, in a sense, early National Park Service naturalists were neither fish nor fowl. They often lacked the respect of their coworkers and had limited status in the true scientific community. Not uncommonly they were referred to by their associates as "nature fakers," "posy pickers," or "Sunday supplement scientists."[29]

Given these attitudes, naturalists were slow to be fully integrated into park management. Following an inspection trip to the parks in the summer of 1935, Harold Bryant reported to Director Arno B. Cammerer, "Apparently the emphatic requests made of superintendents to place naturalists in key positions have not been complied with." He saw "little gain in the effort to make the naturalist an expert consultant on all matters pertaining to education and natural history." He found "the chief criticism of the naturalist service...still that of shallowness of background of some naturalists," although this was being improved. He also noted improvement in the relations between rangers and naturalists: "Yellowstone, which once developed a difficult situation, seemed this summer to be absolutely free from any antagonisms."[30]

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[29]"Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 43.

[30]Memorandum, "Report of Summer Inspection Trip, 1935," NPSHC.

Contention and controversy over the status of interpretation and its practitioners would continue. A quarter-century after Bryant's report the Service's chief of interpretation would again complain that park interpreters were out of the organization's mainstream, enjoying little consideration for advancement into management.[31] But from the 1930s few doubted the importance of interpretation to the Service mission, as a significant part of what the bureau was about.

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[31]Memorandum, Ronald F. Lee to Hillory A. Tolson, Jan. 4, 1960, NPSHC.

BRANCHING INTO HISTORY

There were few historical parks and thus little historical interpretation in the National Park System before the 1930s. Prehistoric human activity was the focus at Mesa Verde and some of the southwestern national monuments, and Indians received secondary attention in several of the large natural parks. Then Horace Albright, director from 1929 to 1933, lobbied actively and successfully to make historical areas a major component of the System. The Service's expansion in this direction--beginning with Colonial (Jamestown and Yorktown) and George Washington Birthplace national monuments in 1930, climaxed in 1933 by wholesale transfer of the War Department's historic forts and battlefields and the National Capital Parks--gave rise to another field of interpretive activity.

The Importance of Historical Interpretation

Generally speaking, historical parks need interpretation more than natural and recreational parks do. Natural parks, typically encompassing spectacular or outstandingly scenic natural features, may be enjoyed aesthetically by most visitors regardless of whether they understand the geologic or biologic phenomena underlying them. Relatively few visitors to parks established primarily for active recreation are receptive to interpretive programs. But although many historical parks have aesthetic appeal and some accommodate active recreation, few can be greatly appreciated without some explanation of who lived or what occurred there. At historical parks, too, altered or missing features are often restored or reconstructed to better "tell the story." In far greater proportion than

at parks established for other purposes, the Service's task at its historical areas--indeed, the basic rationale for its involvement with such areas--is interpretation.

B. Floyd Flickinger, the Service's first park historian, expressed the centrality of interpretation at historic sites thus:

> If no other activities were ever contemplated or attempted, our first obligation, in accepting the custody of an historic site, is preservation. However, our program considers preservation as only a means to an end. The second phase is physical development, which seeks a rehabilitation of the site or area by means of restorations and reconstructions. The third and most important phase is interpretation, and preservation and development are valuable in proportion to their contribution to this phase.[1]

Superintendent John R. White of Sequoia National Park, who could not be accused of a historian's bias, shared the view that interpretation was most important in historical areas--or battlefields, at least:

> The principal difference is that in a scenic park the visitor has a definite objective; he comes to see the colored canyons, the waterfalls, the big trees, the geysers and the wildlife. Incidental to this he may camp out of doors and be entertained by the nature guide service in walks and talks.
>
> But the visitor to a Military or Battlefield park comes to visit the place where a great event in our history occurred. With due respect to historians all battlefields look much alike and there is monotony in lines of overgrown trenches or battery sites; as there is in museums with exhibits of arms, bullets, and records. Only a student or historian can pretend to be deeply interested in the details of each battle. For the average visitor it is necessary to compress the event into a comprehensive whole, and if possible to color and dramatize it to create interest and make lasting impressions.[2]

Likewise, Dale S. King, a Service archeologist, distinguished between the great scenic parks, "recreational and inspirational in character," and

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[1]Paper before American Planning and Civic Association, January 1936, quoted in Harlan D. Unrau and G. Frank Williss, Administrative History: Expansion of the National Park Service in the 1930s (Washington: National Park Service, 1983), p. 168.

[2]Memorandum to Director, Dec. 6, 1941, History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

both the scientific and cultural monuments. In the former "appreciation is conditioned by vision, and not necessarily knowledge." In the latter "the intellectual response receives greater stimulation," requiring understanding for appreciation.[3]

Inaugurating the Program

Anthropologist Clark Wissler of the Educational Advisory Board foresaw archeological and historical sites of the System as vehicles for presenting the whole sequence of American prehistory and history. In a report to the board in 1929 he wrote:

> In view of the importance and the great opportunity for appreciation of the nature and meaning of history as represented in our National Parks and Monuments, it is recommended that the National Parks and Monuments containing, primarily, archeological and historical materials should be selected to serve as indices of periods in the historical sequence of human life in America. At each such monument the particular event represented should be viewed in its immediate historical perspective, thus not only developing a specific narrative but presenting the event in its historical background.
>
> Further, a selection should be made of a number of existing monuments which in their totality may, as points of reference, define the general outline of man's career on this continent.[4]

When the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks recommended establishment of the Branch of Research and Education in Washington, it advised that the office include a historian to oversee the Service's historical program. In 1931 Director Albright followed this advice and appointed Verne E. Chatelain, chairman of the history and social sciences department at Nebraska State Teachers College, as the

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[3]"Scope and Function of the Interpretative Program of the Southwestern National Monuments," in Report of Meeting of Custodians, Southwestern National Monuments, Feb. 14-16, 1940, History Division.

[4]Reports with Recommendations from the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks, January 9, 1929, and November 27, 1929 (n.p., n.d.), p. 24.

Service's first chief historian. Chatelain reported for duty that September, a few months after the Service's first two field historians, Floyd Flickinger and Elbert Cox, were hired at Colonial National Monument.

As befitted his position, Chatelain was a strong advocate of communicating history to the public via historic site interpretation. "Historical activity is primarily not a research program but an educational program in the broader sense," he declared at a history conference he held in November 1931. Calling for park historians "to disseminate accurate information in an interesting manner," he asked them to prepare brochures for their areas and monthly publications like the naturalists' "nature notes."[5]

Following Wissler, Chatelain regarded interpretive potential as paramount in selecting historical additions to the National Park System. "The sum total of the sites which we select should make it possible for us to tell a more or less complete story of American History," he wrote Associate Director Arthur E. Demaray in April 1933. "Keeping in mind the fact that our history is a series of processes marked by certain stages of development, our sites should illustrate and make possible the interpretation of these processes at certain levels of growth." The criteria he drafted for site selection qualified "such sites as are naturally the points or bases from which the broad aspects of prehistoric and historic American life can best be presented, and from which the student of history of the United States can sketch the larger patterns of the American story...."[6]

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[5]Historical conference record, Nov. 27, 1931, History Division.

[6]Letter, Chatelain to Demaray, Apr. 21, 1933, cited in Unrau and Williss, Expansion of the National Park Service, p. 166; John D. McDermott,

In a paper on "History and Our National Parks" prepared for delivery to the American Planning and Civic Association in 1935, Chatelain summarized his outlook:

> The conception which underlies the whole policy of the National Park Service in connection with [historical and archeological] sites is that of using the uniquely graphic qualities which inhere in any area where stirring and significant events have taken place to drive home to the visitor the meaning of those events showing not only their importance in themselves but their integral relationship to the whole history of American development. In other words, the task is to breathe the breath of life into American history for those to whom it has been a dull recital of meaningless facts--to recreate for the average citizen something of the color, the pageantry, and the dignity of our national past.[7]

With the Park Service heavily in the historic site business, new legislation was deemed necessary to explicitly authorize much of what it was already doing to care for these areas. The Historic Sites Act of August 21, 1935, met this need. Previously, the Service had legally based its educational programs on general language in its 1916 organic act enabling it "to provide for the enjoyment" of the parks. The 1935 act was considerably more specific. Among several provisions, it directed the Secretary of the Interior, through the Service, to "establish and maintain museums" in connection with historic properties, to "erect and maintain tablets to mark or commemorate historic or prehistoric places and events of national historical or archaeological significance," and to "develop an educational program and service for the purpose of making available to the public facts and information pertaining to American historic and archaeologic sites, buildings, and properties of national significance." President Franklin D. Roosevelt's letter to Congress

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"Breath of Life: An Outline of the Development of a National Policy for Historic Preservation" (typescript), History Division, 1966, p. 32.

[7]American Planning and Civic Association file, History Division.

supporting passage of the legislation (prepared by Chatelain) claimed that patriotism would be stimulated by these activities: "The preservation of historic sites for the public benefit, together with their proper interpretation, tends to enhance the respect and love of the citizen for the institutions of his country, as well as strengthen his resolution to defend unselfishly the hallowed traditions and high ideals of America."[8]

The new role of history was recognized in the Service organization when the Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings was split off from the Branch of Research and Education in July 1935. Verne Chatelain became acting assistant director in charge of the new branch, a position filled (with different titles) by Ronald F. Lee beginning in 1938. Functions of the branch included "the general leadership in, and guidance of, the park educational program for all historical and archeological areas."[9] Historical interpretation thus attained organizational parity with natural interpretation and enjoyed the clearer legal mandate.

The influx of historical areas to the National Park System from the 1933 government reorganization coincided with the beginnings of the New Deal programs for Depression relief. Funds from the Works Progress Administration, the Public Works Administration, and the Emergency Conservation Work program enabled the Service to build museums at Aztec Ruins and Scotts Bluff national monuments, Colonial and Morristown national historical parks, and Vicksburg, Guilford Courthouse, Shiloh, and Chickamauga

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[8]49 Stat. 666; Roosevelt to Rep. Rene L. DeRouen, Apr. 10, 1935, in U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Public Lands, Preservation of Historic American Sites, Buildings, Objects, and Antiquities of National Significance, House Report 848, 74th Congress, 1935, p. 2.

[9]Memorandum, Historical, No. 1, "Organization and Functions, Branch of Historic Sites and Buildings," July 30, 1936, cited in Unrau and Williss, Expansion of the National Park Service, p. 199.

and Chattanooga national military parks during the 1930s. Many historians, styled "historical technicians," were hired with Civilian Conservation Corps money to conduct research for exhibits and site development, prepare publications, and give talks and tours for the visiting public.

Like their naturalist counterparts, Park Service historians sensed that scholars in academe questioned their professionalism. Chatelain sought academic respectablity for their field of work by promoting historic sites as research and teaching tools. "An historical site is source material for the study of history, just as truly as any written record...," he told the American Planning and Civic Association in 1936. "There is no more effective way of teaching history to the average American than to take him to the site on which some great historic event has occurred, and there to give him an understanding and feeling of that event through the medium of contact with the site itself, and the story that goes along with it."[10]

In fact, historic sites were incidental if not irrelevant to the research concerns of most academic historians, and the Service's focus on the "average American" suggested a sub-professional level of presentation. Some park historians sought to build or maintain their scholarly standing by carrying on research at the expense of public contact duties. This tendency was attacked in a 1937 memorandum from Director Cammerer on the responsibilities of field historians:

> Their first and most important duty is interpretation of the history represented in their respective areas. It should be kept in mind that the ultimate objective of the Service in its administration of historical areas is the teaching of history to the public through the physical sites of its enactment. Research is important and essential, but it is undertaken to make possible the realization

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[10]American Planning and Civic Association file.

> of the ultimate purpose which is interpretation. Any tendency to disparage the importance of handling park visitors as a duty of a highly trained historian should be discouraged. Park Superintendents should do their utmost to place public contact work in the hands of their best personnel and to utilize all personnel resources for conducting an effective, sound interpretive service.[11]

Historical research nevertheless continued to shortchange interpretation in some parks until 1966, when it was centralized in Washington.

Historical Challenges

To the extent that the historians did focus on interpretation, their efforts were sometimes criticized as overly technical. This was especially true at the battlefield parks, disproportionate among the Service's historical areas after 1933.

Most of the Civil War battlefields had been developed and marked by the War Department with the active participation of veterans, who originally constituted a large segment of their visitors. In line with their interests, numerous markers installed on the fields emphasized the composition of involved units and their tactical movements. When the Service inherited the battlefields, their staffs--some also inherited from the War Department--were slow to recognize that contemporary visitors were more likely to appreciate the overall significance of the battles than detailed accounts of their participants and tactics. At a 1940 conference of park historians in Region One (east of the Mississippi), Regional Director Minor R. Tillotson faulted the Service's battlefield interpretation for being slanted to the specialist rather than the layman. The conference responded with a series of recommendations aimed at

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[11]Memorandum to Field Historians and Superintendents of Historical Areas, Nov. 24, 1937, cited in Unrau and Williss, Expansion of the National Park Service, pp. 202-03.

reducing and simplifying battlefield markers.[12] But dissension would persist on the underlying issue: whether Service interpreters and interpretive media should communicate in depth to the relative few receptive to such presentations (in which significance was sometimes buried in factual detail) or hit only the highlights digestible by the lowest common denominator (giving something to everyone but risking scorn for superficiality).

Another problem of historical interpretation was the fact that historical parks often bore little resemblance to the way they had appeared during their historic periods. Features once present had vanished or changed; new features intruded. The extent to which altered sites and structures should be restored or reconstructed was regularly argued, with some leaning to the Williamsburg approach of rebuilding and others favoring exhibits, labels, and other methods to graphically and verbally depict the bygone scene. Because the Service inherited many of its historic sites from other agencies and organizations, its work was frequently complicated by previous efforts at development and interpretation.

One of the Service's first acquisitions in the 1930s exemplifies these problems. George Washington's birthplace in Westmoreland County, Virginia, lacked both the house in which Washington was born and any good record of its appearance. A well-connected private association was already committed to replicating the house, however, and proceeded to build something that Washington might have been born in on the supposed foundations of the original. Although the reconstruction was conjectural and its site was soon disputed by the archeological discovery of a larger

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[12]Minutes, Historical Technicians Conference, Region One, Apr. 25-27, 1940, History Division.

foundation nearby, the Service was reluctant to be forthright about the bogus birthplace. As late as 1956 its historical booklet on George Washington Birthplace National Monument called the foundation beneath the so-called Memorial Mansion "traditionally the one [of the house] in which George Washington was born in 1732." Not until 1975 did the park brochure tell the public what Service archeologists and historians had known for 40 years: the other foundation was that of the birth house.[13] The Memorial Mansion remains to challenge park interpreters and confuse visitors, who find it hard to understand why an old-looking house at Washington's birthplace is not his birthplace or even a facsimile.

Among the Service's legacies from the War Department in 1933 was the Kentucky birthplace of another great American president, Abraham Lincoln. There an old log cabin of dubious pedigree was preserved in a neoclassical stone structure. Service interpretive publications dodged the issue of its authenticity, referring to it as "the traditional birthplace cabin" long after researchers had failed to document any link to Lincoln. A historian chronicling the park's development in 1968 chided the Service for its lack of candor:

> Most visitors come to the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site to see the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln; when they are presented with a log cabin of appropriate humbleness and antiquity, enshrined in a granite memorial, no protestations of its "traditional" nature really suffice to inform the visitors of its doubtful authenticity. The delicacies of the situation are acknowledged. Nevertheless, an agency of the United States Government should not engage in patriotic fulfillment.[14]

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[13]J. Paul Hudson, George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia (Washington: National Park Service, 1956). p. 21; George Washington Birthplace National Monument, Virginia (NPS brochure, 1975).

[14]Gloria Peterson, An Administrative History of Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site (Washington: National Park Service, 1968), p. 98.

But the 1984 park brochure still equivocated, referring to "the birthplace cabin" and calling its past "the subject of much interest and speculation."

After the Washington's birthplace fiasco, the Service adopted and generally pursued policies for historic building restoration and reconstruction stressing accuracy. At Morristown National Historical Park, New Jersey, the Civilian Conservation Corps reconstructed huts of the type used there by Washington's troops during the Revolution. At Hopewell Village (now Hopewell Furnace) National Historic Site, Pennsylvania, the CCC restored and reconstructed several buildings of an 18th and 19th century ironmaking complex. The work at Hopewell, begun in 1936, was an early effort to present a "typical" element of the American past.

Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, Virginia, like Washington's birthplace, lacked its most important feature: the McLean House, where Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered to Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. In this case there was good evidence of the building's location and appearance; many of its dismantled bricks even remained on site. In 1939 Coordinating Superintendent Branch Spalding advocated reconstruction of the house and other community buildings to better interpret the society of rural Virginia during the Civil War.[15]

Chief Historian Ronald Lee, perhaps influenced by the Washington's birthplace experience, was opposed; he favored displaying the McLean House foundations and "possibly a model of the building exhibited in a museum on the area." But in the "second surrender of Lee at Appomattox," he yielded to strong local sentiment, and the Service reconstructed the

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[15]Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., Preservation Comes of Age: From Williamsburg to the National Trust, 1926-1949 (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1981), pp. 624-25.

house after the war. Later it reconstructed the courthouse to serve as the park's visitor center and museum. It stopped short of adopting Sequoia Superintendent John White's proposal to reconstruct Lee and Grant in the McLean House parlor, however.[16]

At the Jamestown end of Colonial National Historical Park anti-reconstruction sentiment prevailed. The foundations of the colonial town were excavated during the late 1930s, and the probable appearance of the buildings they had supported was interpreted to the public via on-site exhibits. Archeologist Jean C. Harrington arranged for visitors to watch the excavations in progress and tour his laboratory and artifact storage building. Interpretation thus extended from the historic settlement to the practice of historical archeology.[17]

In natural park interpretation, the present features--often scenic and spectacular--were the focus of attention; an understanding of what had occurred in the past to form those features might increase public appreciation of them but was usually not essential to a rewarding visit. In historical park interpretation, the present resources were more often unspectacular; their value derived largely or solely from what had occurred in the past. The interpretive focus thus had to be on the past--on subjects that were not always fully understood, whose significance was not always closely tied to or illustrated by the sites in either their past or present state.

Soon after George Washington Carver's death in 1943, his Missouri

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[16]Ibid.; memorandum, White to Director, Dec. 6, 1941, History Division.

[17]Ralph Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service," draft manuscript, 1983, p. 32.

birthplace became the third birthplace of a prominent American and the first site honoring a black added to the National Park System. It had no structural remains reflecting Carver's few years there as a slave child, nor was it associated with his career as a scientist. Further complicating interpretation was a lack of solid data on Carver's scientific contributions. To resolve this shortcoming, the Service contracted with two University of Missouri scientists in 1960 for a review and assessment of his work.

The study concluded that the accomplishments for which Carver was most widely credited--his discovery of hundreds of peanut and sweet potato products, transforming the economy of the South from dependency on cotton --could not be substantiated. Fearful of stirring racial sensitivities, the Service's Omaha office urged that the study be kept under wraps:

> While Professors [William R.] Carroll and [Merle E.] Muhrer are very careful to emphasize Carver's excellent qualities, their realistic appraisal of his "scientific contributions," which loom so large in the Carver legend, is information which must be handled very carefully as far as outsiders are concerned. To put it plainly, it seems to us that individuals or organizations who are inclined to be rather militant in their approach to racial relationships might take offense at a study which superficially purports to lessen Dr. Carver's stature.... Our present thinking is that the report should not be published, at least in its present form, simply to avoid any possible misunderstandings.[18]

Interpretation at George Washington Carver National Monument did ultimately play down Carver's "discoveries," stressing instead his inspirational qualities and his role as a teacher and humanitarian. The 1984 park brochure reflected the new tone: "It is not so much his specific achievements as the humane philosophy behind them that define

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[18]William R. Carroll and Merle E. Muhrer, "The Scientific Contributions of George Washington Carver," unpublished report, 1962; memorandum, Regional Director Howard W. Baker to Director, Feb. 21, 1962, History Division.

the man."

Custer Battlefield National Monument, transferred from the War Department in 1940, presented a different challenge. Interpretation at the site of "Custer's Last Stand" long tended to stress if not glorify Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer at the expense of his Sioux and Cheyenne adversaries. As the Indian viewpoint became more militantly expressed in the 1960s and 70s, the Service moved to a more balanced presentation. A quotation from a Sioux battle participant, "Know the power that is peace," was prominently installed on the park visitor center wall in time for the 1976 centennial observance. Some advocated changing the park name to "Little Bighorn National Battlefield," which would further shift the commemorative focus while bringing the designation into line with those of other historic battlefields named for places rather than participants.

The proposed retitling stalled, but interpretive revisionism proceeded otherwise. Some of the large cadre of "Custer buffs" voiced indignation, drawing parallels with Soviet efforts to rewrite history. The Service recognized the perils inherent in reinterpretation under pressure and to its credit pursued a factual and evenhanded course. Responding to continued criticism, in 1984 it commissioned a group of outside authorities representing the various viewpoints to appraise the park's interpretive media. The committee concluded that the exhibits and publications were balanced--an evaluation still disputed by the most vocal Custer enthusiasts.

When it came to factually interpreting national park history, the Service was its own worst enemy. For decades, at evening campfire programs and elsewhere, its interpreters presented the "national park idea" as

having originated at a campfire of the 1870 Washburn-Langford-Doane expedition to the Yellowstone region. Although sentiments favoring establishment of Yellowstone National Park may have been expressed at such a campfire, the occasion was inadequately documented, and national park advocacy considerably predated it.

Investigations from the 1930s on cast doubt upon the "campfire story," but it was already firmly entrenched in Service tradition and continued to be retailed in publications, museum exhibits, and public programs. In 1964 the Midwest Region's chief of interpretation, Edwin C. Alberts, courageously dissented to his regional director: "It is obvious that the frequent attribution, with respect to 'birth of the National Park idea,' to the participants at this 19th Century campfire are based on very tenuous grounds and in view of current curiosity about the matter by more than one non-Service historian, we'd be wise to pull back on our approach to avoid embarrassment." The story could still be presented, argued Alberts, as a legend.[19] His recommendation was gradually heeded, but old customs and myths die hard, and as with the Lincoln birthplace cabin, the subtlety of qualifying something as "traditional" is often lost on audiences.

Occasionally interpretive personnel constituted interpretive challenges. When the Service inherited Gettysburg National Military Park from the War Department in 1933, it inherited the private guides licensed by the former park administration to accompany visitors around the battlefield. Some lacked a high school education, and their interpretation was not always up to professional standards. Although the Service was

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19 Memorandum of Aug. 27, 1964, Midwest Region file K1815, Washington National Records Center (WNRC), Suitland, Md.

empowered to review the qualifications and performance of the guides in renewing their licenses, weeding out the incompetents proved difficult in practice: the guides had community ties and political influence and could make it difficult for a park superintendent bent on cleaning house.

An extreme case came to light in 1953, when Superintendent J. Walter Coleman wrote his regional director:

> We have recently had two serious complaints regarding the ability of Guide J. Warren Gilbert.
>
> Yesterday Charles J. Lantz of E. Cleveland, Ohio, a member of the faculty at Case Institute, took the trouble to call on us and report that his trip over the Park with Mr. Gilbert was a complete failure. He stated that the Guide could not speak fluently and was incoherent. They could hardly understand anything that he said.
>
> A second group of visitors recently employed him and made a a second trip with Guide Kenneth Johns. They told Mr. Johns that their Guide could not be understood and that he fell asleep on the trip four times.
>
> According to his card, Mr. Gilbert has been guiding sixty years but that is presumably out of date. He was born four days after Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address and is therefore in his 90th year. While he would not normally guide very much longer and we have never taken any action such as this, I suppose that in the interest of the public we should discontinue his license.[20]

In the mid-1950s consideration was given to bringing the Gettysburg guides under civil service for better control, as had been done with private guides at Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site and Mammoth Cave National Park. Coleman recommended against doing so: it would be harder to meet the flexible public need for guides with full-time employees, and some of the better guides with other jobs would leave rather than be converted. He foresaw the less effective old-timers departing through attrition, with younger men better equipped by education and personality taking over.[21]

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[20]Memorandum of Aug. 11, 1953, Gettysburg file K1815, WNRC.

[21]Memorandum, Regional Director Daniel J. Tobin to Director, Jan. 26, 1956, Gettysburg file K1815, WNRC.

While Gettysburg could be toured at leisure, with or without a guide, the situation at Fort Sumter National Monument in Charleston Harbor was different. Visitors had to arrive and depart via a commercial Gray Line boat tour and had only half an hour at Fort Sumter. Conducting every boatload through the fort in 1955, Wednesday through Sunday, was Historian Rock L. Comstock, Jr. On the weekends there was no separate transportation for Comstock, so he had to arrive with the passengers on the first Gray Line boat and depart with those on the last. Of this arrangement a regional office evaluator reported:

> This means that the guide must leap off the boat when it docks, rush up to the fort on a dead run, start the generators, turn on the lights, unlock the doors, get out literature and the post card machine, get back to the flagpole and raise the flag before the visitors arrive there. Often he does not have time to raise the flag. When the last group leaves in the afternoon, he goes through all this in reverse, and leaps on the boat as it pulls away. It calls for nothing less than an Olympic decathlon champion. Not only is this inefficient and undignified, but it contributes to the feeling of haste that permeates the whole place while visitors are there, and which does so much to detract from the visitor's enjoyment and getting the "supreme experience" he should from his visit to Fort Sumter. Worst of all, this goes on during the days of heaviest visitation.[22]

Fortunately, Historian Comstock survived this harrowing duty for a distinguished career in interpretation.

Beyond the specific problems confronted at particular parks, historic site interpretation as a vehicle for communicating American history to the public posed more subtle, less-easily-overcome difficulties. Despite early hopes that historical additions to the National Park System might be selected "to tell a more or less complete story of American History," in Verne Chatelain's words, park acquisitions proceeded on no

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[22]J. C. Harrington, "Study of Visitor Needs and Interpretive Service, Fort Sumter National Monument, South Carolina," June 6, 1955, Fort Sumter file K1815, WNRC.

such rational basis. Local public and political pressure behind particular sites far outweighed considerations of thematic balance (and sometimes produced national historical parks of less-than-national significance). As it evolved, therefore, the System was better equipped to tell some aspects of the American story than others.

In fact, this imbalance is inherent in the medium with which the National Park Service deals. Extant physical resources susceptible of being preserved and interpreted to park visitors are not equally dispersed among the major themes of history, nor are all themes equally well conveyed via such resources. Much of military history is intrinsically site-related and can be appreciated by visiting battlefields and forts; thus there is value in maintaining and presenting those resources within parks, as the Service does with great sufficiency. The history of such topics as philosophy and education, on the other hand, is not so readily communicated by sites, structures, and objects, and the System is weak in these areas. Similarly, the many facets of prehistoric culture in America vary greatly in the prominence of remains illustrating them. The Indians of the Southwest left impressive cliff dwellings and pueblos--splendid for parks and monuments--while much less is apparent from many Eastern cultures.

As Ronald A. Foresta has noted, the Service is not the keeper of the nation's history but of some of its major historic resources: "[O]nly part of the past lends itself to interpretation through physical remains and...this part...is the proper realm of the Park Service."[23] The System is indeed imbalanced, but this is not necessarily bad. The problem lies

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[23]America's National Parks and Their Keepers (Washington: Resources for the Future, 1984), p. 274.

less with the imbalance than with those who either deny it--pretending the Service is telling the whole story--or deplore it and urge expansion into subject areas better communicated by other media.

Another pitfall is a tendency to focus on the site and its story at the expense of context and proper evaluation. An interpreter at a historical park established by act of Congress and maintained and staffed at public expense is entitled to assume that the place is nationally significant. Whether it is or not, the interpreter's presence there gives him or her a vested interest in its historical importance. Visitors, too, like to hear how important the site is; they do not want to be told that they have gone out of their way to see something that played a secondary role in this war or that series of events. The very act of telling and retelling the single site's story--in contrast to the classroom teacher surveying the sweep of history--tends to magnify its significance.

There may also be a reluctance to accept and incorporate in one's interpretive program evidence that suggests a site was less important than once thought. Sites established for historical figures--in fact to "honor" those figures--present special problems when their subjects undergo scholarly devaluation: the Service feels committed to positive portrayals and tends to dismiss criticism. Because "honoring" to some degree has motivated the establishment of most historical parks, units of the System focusing on wholly negative aspects of America's past are virtually nonexistent.

If historical interpretation in the National Park Service has faced challenges and displayed shortcomings, its overall influence has been positive, making many Americans aware of important aspects of their

heritage that they had long forgotten or never learned about in school. Visitors to historic sites have gained a sense of presence and immediacy with past events that has often stimulated the most latent interest in history. It is safe to say that park presentations have been a good deal better than most other popular treatments of history, and correctives to their biases and omissions are available to the interested public from other sources. The Service may not tell the whole story, but it has told most of its part of the story well.

NEW DIRECTIONS

Audiovisual Innovations

National park interpretation began with talks, guided hikes or tours, and museum exhibits. Technological advances, increased visitation, lack of interpretive staff, the desire for consistent presentation quality, and sometimes just the lure of novelty inspired a range of new media and techniques over the years. Some stood the test of time to become permanent ingredients of interpretive programming; others proved of transitory value.

Guided automobile caravans were initiated at Mesa Verde and Yosemite in 1929, at Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Sequoia the next year, and at some of the battlefield parks during the 1930s. The interpreter in the park car leading the procession sometimes broadcast to his followers via a rooftop loudspeaker. As auto traffic increased this method became unwieldy and was phased out. Two new interpretive alliances with private enterprise were tried in 1932: naturalists accompanied privately operated airplane flights over the Grand Canyon and deep sea fishing excursions at Acadia.[1]

Slides, motion pictures, sound recordings, and other audiovisual media became increasingly popular as electronic technology advanced. Films and recorded voices could supplement or substitute for in-person presentations and reach more visitors with messages of consistent quality.

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[1]C. Frank Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation through World War II," Journal of Forest History, January 1978, p. 40; Report of Director, National Park Service, in Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1932 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1932), p. 23.

On the negative side, they were less personal and subject to breakdown.

Electric maps, with colored lights signaling military action and other historical events, were in use at Vicksburg National Military Park and Tumacacori National Monument in the early 1940s. At a 1947 historians' conference, Superintendent James R. McConaghie of Vicksburg demonstrated a portable electric map that his staff took to schools. A decade later lighted maps that visitors actuated by pushing buttons proliferated in historical park museums. Because children loved to play with them, they often entertained more than enlightened.

The Washington Monument had a recorded interpretive message in 1947. Superintendent McConaghie then proposed to install coin-operated record players at Vicksburg tour stops, without result. By 1950 Petersburg National Battlefield had a recording at The Crater; it was judged successful after its 10-minute play was shortened.[2]

In the mid-1950s visitor-activated audiovisual devices came into wide use. By 1963, 90 parks shared more than 100 audio stations using speakers or handphones and several dozen fully automatic movie and slide programs. Most of the latter used Admatic machines accommodating up to 30 slides and 10 minutes of narration. The Division of Interpretation in Washington recommended these for orientation, suggesting that programs begin with a reference to the National Park Service and include several slides showing a man in uniform helping visitors enjoy the park. In addition, modern projection and sound equipment was installed in 46

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[2]Minutes of the Conference of Historians, Gettysburg National Military Park, May 5-9, 1947, History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.; Minutes, Conference of Regional Historians and Archeologists, January 20-26, 1951, History Division.

amphitheaters and campfire circles.[3]

Acoustiguides were adopted at the Home of Franklin D. Roosevelt National Historic Site in 1963. Eleanor Roosevelt did the narration for these portable audio devices carried by visitors; her reminiscences of the house and its occupants and guests made for outstanding interpretation. Ethel Roosevelt Derby, Theodore Roosevelt's daughter, later did the same for Acoustiguides in her father's home at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site.

MISSION 66, a ten-year program to improve park facilities for the fiftieth anniversary of the Service in 1966, funded most of these advances. "In 1954 no national park had any automatic audio or audio-visual installation in operation," a 1963 progress report stated. "Now, in less than nine years, automatic audio-visual devices have become indispensible tools for communication with park visitors."[4]

The devices did not always communicate well or appropriately. On a trip through Region III (later the Southwest Region) in 1958, Donald J. Erskine, a naturalist who would later head the Service's audiovisual branch in Washington, found that only Big Bend National Park had no mechanical problems with its Admatic. Erskine also sounded a note of caution about the bandwagon tendency he perceived: "There is some danger that those doing interpretive planning may become so enthusiastic about audio-visual devices that they will attempt to use them in situations where they are not really needed. We must recognize that personal

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[3]Memorandum, Chief, Division of Interpretation, Ronald F. Lee to All Field Areas, Jan. 9, 1957, Washington Office file K1815, Washington National Records Center (WNRC), Suitland, Md.; MISSION 66 Progress Report, October 1963, History Division.

[4]MISSION 66 Progress Report.

service is almost always best and that in some situations 'silence is golden.'"[5]

Ironically, when the planners of interpretation for Fort Davis National Historic Site resisted the tendency Erskine feared, top Service management criticized their prospectus for its "complete absence of AV interpretive devices" and suggested an audiovisual program in the visitor center and a few audio stations along the tour route.[6] At Fort Caroline National Memorial the tendency was not resisted. Because one of the Huguenots who came to the short-lived Florida outpost in 1564 had played the spinet back in France, a specimen of that 16th-century keyboard instrument was procured for the visitor center and a button-actuated recording of a similar instrument entertained park visitors. Bugle calls at frontier forts and dialect voices at certain sites of ethnic distinction exemplified more effective and appropriate audio applications during the 1960s.

In 1958 the Division of Interpretation became interested in "sound and light," the dramatic medium used at several historic monuments in Europe including Versailles and the Chateau of Chambord. Ronald Lee, its chief, received French sound and light entrepreneurs the following year and began planning for installations at Independence National Historical Park, Castillo de San Marcos National Monument, Fort McHenry National Monument, and San Juan National Historic Site. The Fort McHenry plans were shelved and those for San Juan deferred, but Independence and

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[5]Memorandum to Chief Naturalist, Jan. 20, 1958, Washington Office file K1815, WNRC.

[6]Memorandum, Assistant Director Jackson E. Price to Regional Director, Southwest Region, Apr. 16, 1963, Washington Office file K1815, WNRC.

Castillo de San Marcos had shows ready for the summer of 1962.

The Castillo program, produced and operated under concession contract by the Sound and Light Corporation of America, featured the voices of Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., and Ralph Bellamy and music by Bernard Green performed by members of the New York Philarmonic. The installation required 294 lights, 64 stereo speakers, more than 15 miles of cable, and seating for 750. Because of the need to minimize the visual impact of the installation during the daytime, much of the equipment had to be mounted before each performance and removed afterward. Adult viewers were charged $1.50 and children 75 cents. The program was judged reasonably successful from an interpretive standpoint, but its high operating cost and inconsistent patronage led to its demise in 1965.[7]

"The American Bell," the program focusing on Independence Hall, was written by Archibald MacLeish, narrated by Frederic March, and accompanied by music composed and conducted by David Amram with members of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Lumadrama, Inc., the producer and concessioner, ran the show for the same admission charged by the Castillo operator. The program was criticized for attributing undue significance to the Liberty Bell. Because it was too costly to install the lights and speakers for each performance, they were left to clutter Independence Square. Even so, the operator lost money with the inadequate paid attendance. The Park Service took over the program and operated it free until 1984, when maintenance and replacement of the obsolete equipment was no longer feasible.[8]

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[7]Press Information Kit, Castillo file K1815, WNRC.

[8]Sound and Light Programs file, History Division.

While regional director in the Philadelphia office, Ronald Lee urged Lumadrama to do a sound and light program at Gettysburg in 1963, but the company was already losing its enthusiasm for the medium and declined. Ford's Theater National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., was next to try it: in 1968 the Service gave Guggenheim Productions a $300,000 contract to design, produce, and install a program in the theater. It opened July 21, 1970, to good reviews, but it was costly to operate and its equipment became obsolete and difficult to maintain. It was discontinued in September 1974 and replaced the following summer with "informances," a series of skits performed under contract by University of Maryland drama students depicting lifestyles, personalities, and attitudes during Lincoln's era. Sound and light finally came to San Juan National Historic Site in 1976, installed by a French company at the behest of Puerto Rico's tourism bureau. High maintenance costs and poor attendance led to its demise within a year.[9]

Another audiovisual extravaganza was planned for the bicentennial year of 1976 in Washington, where the Service converted Union Station to the National Visitor Center. In the middle of its grand concourse was dug a great Pit into which the expected hordes would descend and view PAVE--the Primary Audio-Visual Experience. PAVE involved 100 Carousel projectors behind 100 screens beaming a "Welcome to Washington" program--an overwhelming triumph of medium over message. The hordes did not come, the National Visitor Center folded after five years, and the primary legacy of PAVE was 100 surplus Carousels.

The bicentennial prompted another advance in electronic interpreta-

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[9]Ibid.; telephone conversation with Joseph Geary, Sept. 20, 1985; telephone conversation with Loretta L. Schmidt, Jan. 7, 1986.

tion at Independence National Historical Park. As part of the development at Franklin Court, site of Benjamin Franklin's home, some 50 telephones were provided on which visitors could dial various historical figures for their opinions of Franklin. The voices were recorded on 100 Labelle Playmatic message repeaters. The bicentennial development at Franklin Court was visually remarkable for its "ghost" reconstruction of Franklin's house: because evidence for a traditional reconstruction was lacking, only the envelope of the house was outlined with steel members. The responsible architectural firm, Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown, won an American Institute of Architects honor award for the Franklin Court design.

Bicentennial improvements at Kings Mountain National Military Park, South Carolina, incorporated yet another imaginative technique. The battle there pitted American loyalists against revolutionaries. To portray this civil strife in the new park visitor center, groups of figures representing each side were placed at opposite ends of the exhibit room and engaged in a recorded argument. "Unfortunately, the exhibit did not work," a historian of the park has reported. "The shouting match between the Loyalists and the Patriots confused visitors. The exhibit's audio system began automatically as visitors walked into the room. The audio and visual portions of the exhibit were rarely synchronized. One part of the story would be playing on the tape, while the lights would be directed to a different part of the room."[10] The idea was good, but as sometimes happened with audiovisual innovations, technological shortcomings proved its undoing.

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[10]Greg Massey, "Kings Mountain National Military Park Administrative History," draft manuscript, 1985, pp. 129-30, copy in History Division.

In 1975 the national parks had a total of 707 audiovisual programs.[11] Beyond increasing that total, the bicentennial prompted numerous other interpretive developments and activities. "Interpretive programs in all parks should incorporate special Bicentennial activities during the year," the Servicewide goals for interpretation for 1976 stated.[12] The Mid-Atlantic Regional Office in Philadelphia produced and distributed throughout the System a Bicentennial Daybook, providing a day-by-day account of significant events during the revolutionary period. The Harpers Ferry Center sponsored two traveling plays, "We've Come Back for a Little Look Around" and "People of '76," that portrayed figures of the Revolution. "Playlets" depicting episodes of the period were held in the unfurnished rooms of the restored Thomas Nelson House in the Yorktown portion of Colonial National Historical Park. All revolutionary battlefield parks held special observances on the 200th anniversaries of their battles, culminating at Yorktown in 1981.

Museums, Visitor Centers, and the New Look

Government spending for Depression relief under the New Deal beginning in 1933 enabled much park museum construction, an activity previously supported almost entirely by private philanthropy. By 1939 the National Park System contained 76 museums, about one-third with permanent exhibits in permanent buildings. In addition, there were then 37 furnished historic structures, including houses and fort buildings, classed as historic

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[11] William W. Dunmire, "Report on Interpretation," 1975, History of Interpretation files, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry, W. Va. (hereinafter cited as NPSHC).

[12] *In Touch*, March 1976, p. 3.

house museums.[13]

In 1935 a Museum Division was established in the Service's Washington office under Assistant Director Harold C. Bryant's Branch of Research and Education. Carl P. Russell initially headed the division, followed by Ned J. Burns in 1936. In his Field Manual for Museums, published by the Service in 1941, Burns outlined the special role of park museums:

> While park museums perform the same general functions as other museums, they have a special character of their own.... Since the museum is interpreting the park, its main exhibits are concerned with the park features and such phenomena outside its boundaries as may be pertinent. The formal exhibits in the museum building are merely explanatory devices to make clear the natural and historical exhibits outside. In a sense the park as a whole may be regarded as an exhibit and the museum as an explanatory label. This concept underlies all park museum work.[14]

In a few cases, however, museums were developed in memorial or other park units lacking intrinsic natural or historic resources illustrating their subject matter. One, defined by Burns as "the largest and most complex historical museum project to be undertaken by the Museum Division," was the Museum of Westward Expansion at Jefferson National Expansion Memorial in St. Louis. Assigned to the division in 1938, the project did not get underway until the 1960s. A historical research team under William C. Everhart then supplied content to John Jenkins, who completed a general layout plan in 1961 fitting more than 200 exhibits under 12 thematic units related to the westward movement.[15] The museum, relating only symbolically to the site, lies beneath Eero Saarinen's dramatic

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[13]Ned J. Burns, Field Manual for Museums (Washington: National Park Service, 1941), p. 24.

[14]Ibid., p. 2.

[15]Ibid., p. 14; Ralph Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service," draft manuscript, 1983, p. 198, copy in History Division.

Gateway Arch. Other Service museums serving as attractions in themselves rather than "explanatory labels" for their locations include the American Museum of Immigration in the base of the Statue of Liberty and the National Maritime Museum at Golden Gate National Recreation Area in San Francisco.

The design and production of museum exhibits required special facilities and talent. Exhibit preparation for eastern parks was carried on at Fort Hunt, south of Alexandria, Virginia, from 1934 to 1938; then at Ford's Theatre in Washington to January 1948, the war years excepted; then back at Fort Hunt for eight months; then at a garage at 21st and L streets, northwest, in Washington to March 1953; then at a temporary building on the National Mall where the National Air and Space Museum now lies until September 1966; then in commercial space in Springfield, Virginia, until 1970. Exhibits for the western parks were prepared at the Field Division of Education at Berkeley, California, which became the Western Museum Laboratory in 1937. Dorr G. Yeager, formerly chief naturalist at Yellowstone and Rocky Mountain national parks, then headed the facility as assistant chief of the Museum Division and supervised a staff of about 200 (most hired with New Deal emergency funding). Like its eastern counterpart, the Western Museum Laboratory expired during World War II; it was not revived until September 1957 for MISSION 66. It then occupied the old U.S. Mint until 1968, when its remaining exhibit production function moved east to temporary quarters in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Two years later the consolidated museum laboratory occupied the new Interpretive Design Center at Harpers Ferry, its current home.[16]

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[16]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 42; Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service."

The perception of park museums as explanatory labels for their parks tended to a narrative approach in exhibit design. This was especially true in historical parks interpreting "stories" or sequences of events. Museums in such parks through the mid-1960s commonly attempted to narrate the park stories through exhibits, heavy with text, laid out in sequential fashion--even while the stories might also be told in publications, films, talks, and other media.

This "book on the wall" syndrome came under attack in 1964, when George B. Hartzog, Jr., became Service director. Hartzog appointed a Museum Study Team composed of William S. Bahlman, chief of the Management Analysis Division; John B. Cabot, an architect; Harold L. Peterson, a historian-curator; and Assistant Regional Director I. J. (Nash) Castro of the National Capital Region. Its report, approved by Hartzog on March 31, called for a reordering of interpretive media. Museum exhibits would no longer be the primary medium backing up personal contacts; instead, "The narrative story should, generally, be presented through publications and audiovisual means."[17]

Rather than narrating, exhibits would serve to engage the entering visitor's interest with intrinsically visual materials like artifacts, artwork, and photographs in discrete displays. Acting Chief Wayne W. Bryant of the Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services explained the new approach in a memorandum drafted by Marc Sagan, a rising star among the Service's interpretive planners:

> The usual reluctance to omit part of a story from a presentation in any medium stems from the fear that some visitors may miss some of the story. They will, despite our plans.

17Lewis, "Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service," pp. 208-09.

> We cannot assume the responsibility to give everyone every bit of the message in a complete flowing sequence. Visitors are going to "window shop" and sample our wares regardless of our approach. We therefore propose to put only the finest exhibit subjects into our introductory displays....
>
> ...When we try to combine introduction with enrichment in one exhibit series, we produce a clutter that doesn't whet the appetite ...it discourages, it looks like work, it's heavy. Our first job as interpreters is to stimulate interest. We must drop our compulsion to tell the complete story through exhibits if we are to achieve a new look or, more important, if we are to improve our communication with visitors.[18]

The new role of exhibits as introductory rather than narrative was stimulated by the visitor center concept, a major contribution of MISSION 66. Whereas park museums were viewed as supplemental to the visitor experience, visitor centers--multiple use facilities emphasizing orientation--were seen as integral to it. According to the MISSION 66 prospectus published in January 1956,

> The Visitor Center is the hub of the park interpretive program. Here trained personnel help the visitor start his trip and with the aid of museum exhibits, dioramas, relief models, recorded slide talks, and other graphic devices, help visitors understand the meaning of the park and its features, and how best to protect, use, and appreciate them.... Many parks lack visitor centers today, and a substantial portion of park visitors, lacking these services, drive almost aimlessly about the parks without adequate benefit and enjoyment from their trips....
>
> [O]ne of the most pressing needs for each area is the visitor center....[19]

Before MISSION 66 there were only three visitor centers, so called, in the National Park System: one at Grand Canyon National Park and two at Colonial National Historical Park. By 1960 56 visitor centers had been opened or authorized. By 1975 the Service operated 281 visitor

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[18]Memorandum to Regional Director, Southwest Region, Aug. 19, 1964, Southwest Regional Office file K1815, WNRC.

[19]MISSION 66 for the National Park System, pp. 29, 92.

centers.[20] Some were former museums retitled as such. Some were historic buildings or other existing structures adapted, in whole or part, to the new purpose. Some housed administrative offices and even maintenance facilities along with their visitor service areas.

Ideally, visitor centers were designed and located to attract most park visitors and overlook significant park resources while not competing unduly with the resources for visitor attention nor intruding visually upon them. This difficult challenge was often met successfully; sometimes it was not. In some parks lacking intrinsic values, such as those established to commemorate persons or events leaving no physical traces, new visitor centers with their interpretive media properly served as the primary attractions. The facilities at Coronado and DeSoto national memorials, commemorating explorers who had traversed their general vicinities, exemplified this role. In some other parks with significant but relatively subtle resources, prominent visitor centers overpowered what should have been the focus: visitors might spend more time in them than viewing the features for which the parks were established.

The notion that every park needed a visitor center was clearly misguided. Some parks spoke very well for themselves; others, including most historic house areas, were best interpreted via personally conducted or self-guided tours with only the simplest on-site exhibits or labels. Unfortunately, a number of visitor centers--requiring costly staffing, energy consumption, and maintenance--were built in such areas before the lesson was learned. "Today we are shifting emphasis away from building

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[20]Ronald F. Lee, "What's New in Interpretation," paper for Visitor Services Conference, Williamsburg, Va., Dec. 2, 1959, Interpretive Programs file, History Division; William W. Dunmire, "Report on Interpretation," 1975, NPSHC.

more centers that may, in fact, impinge on a visitor's limited time in a park to onsite, outdoor facilities and services that more directly relate to park resources," reported William W. Dunmire, chief of the Interpretation Division, in 1975.[21] The shift came too late for the new visitor center at Independence National Historical Park, where a rich array of historic buildings was sufficient to consume the attention of most visitors, and for Service involvement with the National Visitor Center in Washington, also being readied for the bicentennial year of 1976. (The National Visitor Center, intended to orient visitors to the National Capital but largely ignored by them during its five years of existence, ranks as perhaps the greatest fiasco in Service history.) As late as 1982 a superfluous, intrusive visitor center was completed on the grounds of the Frederick Douglass Home in Washington, a property requiring only good conducted tours through the furnished house to convey its significance. In such cases visitor center construction reflected a lack of confidence in personal interpretive services as compared to exhibitry and audiovisual media--the latter transmitting consistent if impersonal messages--and perhaps the tendency of the institution to publicize its presence.

The "new look" in museum design initiated in 1964 was part of a general reform of Service interpretation advanced by George Hartzog's chief of interpretation, William C. Everhart. (While superintendent of Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, Hartzog had been impressed with Everhart's work there and named him to the Washington post when he became director.) If exhibits were not to tell the whole story, closer coordination among the several media planners would be needed. Hartzog and

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[21] "Report on Interpretation."

Everhart reorganized and geographically consolidated the Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services to bring this about and made significant new appointments to modernize the Service's exhibitry, publications, and audiovisual production.

Carl G. Degen was hired from the Protestant Radio-TV Center in Atlanta to head the new Branch of Motion Pictures and Audiovisual Services, giving the Service its own motion picture capability for the first time. In the next years the branch would produce some highly creative films, like that for Booker T. Washington National Monument using a collage technique and that for Fort Frederica National Monument using actors amid the excavated foundation ruins of that site. The Service had already engaged Vincent L. Gleason, who moved from an advertising agency in 1962, to upgrade its interpretive publications. Gleason's branch redesigned the park brochures in new formats, including the minifolder, and engaged contemporary artists to illustrate park handbooks and posters. The new organization divided the old museum division into curatorial and design/production functions. Ralph Lewis, previously the division chief, took charge of the former activity; Russell J. Hendrickson, an exhibit designer who had briefly left the Service to become chief of exhibit production for the Agriculture Department, returned to head the latter.

Vince Gleason originated the concept of building a center to house all the interpretive design functions, then scattered in several offices and localities. In 1964 Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, was tentatively selected for the new facility. It was not too far from Washington; it was the site of the new Mather Training Center for park interpreters; and it was likely to win the necessary appropriations with the support of West Virginia Senators Jennings Randolph and Robert C. Byrd. Hartzog

obtained planning funds in the Service's 1967 budget, and Everhart engaged New York architect Ulrich Franzen. The Interpretive Design Center was constructed on the former Storer College campus at Harpers Ferry during 1968-1969 and was occupied in March 1970.[22]

In late 1967 Everhart was elevated to the post of assistant director for interpretation and the functions under him were raised from branch to division status. With the occupancy of the Interpretive Design Center, Everhart was made director of the Harpers Ferry Center, a new unit outside the Washington headquarters organization. In addition to supervising the interpretive divisions, Everhart became responsible for the adjacent Mather Training Center and Harpers Ferry National Historical Park, which was to be "a 'showcase' to test and display advanced park management techniques."[23] The training center and park were under the Harpers Ferry Center only briefly. Another reorganization in 1973 returned Everhart as assistant director for interpretation, in command of an Interpretation Division in Washington under Bill Dunmire and the Harpers Ferry Center then and since headed by Marc Sagan. The assistant director for interpretation position was discontinued again in 1975, when Everhart became a special assistant to Director Gary Everhardt.

The "new look" in exhibitry, publication design, and audiovisual production fostered by Everhart, Sagan, Gleason, Degen, Hendrickson, and their Harpers Ferry Center colleagues was not welcomed in all quarters. Some Service traditionalists complained that innovative style and

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[22]William C. Everhart, "The Origins of the Interpretive Design Center, With Comments on the Progress of Interpretation, 1964-1970," NPSHC.

[23]Memorandum, Hartzog to Assistant Secretary of the Interior Laurence H. Dunn, "Establishment of Harpers Ferry Center," Oct. 20, 1969, HPSHC.

techniques were taking precedence over content. In 1970 Chief Historian Robert M. Utley crossed swords with Vince Gleason over the artwork Gleason had commissioned from Leonard Baskin, a prominent contemporary artist, for Utley's Custer Battlefield handbook. (Gleason omitted the most offending illustration but left a blank page so that it could be reproduced in subsequent printings.) A slide program prepared for Manassas National Battlefield Park was condemned because it used impressionistic modern watercolors rather than literal representations of the historic events there. Those enamored of the "book on the wall" approach thought the new museums, favoring fewer exhibits with less narrative and more eye appeal, superficial. Design critics, on the other hand, responded enthusiastically to the innovations. Service films won numerous awards over the years, and in 1985 President Ronald Reagan presented the Presidential Award for Design Excellence to the Division of Publications.

What did the public think? Survey evidence is lacking. Undoubtedly some visitors, especially "buffs" who had schooled themselves in the subjects presented, concurred in the charges of superficiality. Probably more were attracted than repelled, however, for a net positive response to the Service's interpretive design innovations.

Living History

Well before "living history" became fashionable in the mid-1960s, a few parks undertook limited recreations of historical activities or processes. In the mid-1930s a replica of an early Indian camp was constructed behind the museum in Yosemite National Park. "An old squaw occupies the camp daily; she demonstrates the weaving of baskets, preparation of foodstuffs, and sings Indian songs. This 'live exhibit' has

proved to be of great interest to visitors," a 1936 Service publication reported. Navahos performed traditional dances for visitors at Mesa Verde National Park. At the behest of Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, Pierce Mill in Rock Creek Park, Washington, D.C., was restored as an operating gristmill in 1936; the meal was used in government cafeterias. At a 1940 meeting of Southwestern National Monuments custodians, Dale S. King encouraged them to find local Indians who would produce handicrafts and suggested having a Mormon girl bake tarts at Pipe Spring National Monument when that site was refurnished.[24]

By the mid-1950s there were a few other living history forerunners in the parks. Mule-drawn barge trips were underway on a restored section of the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal in Washington, D.C. On the Blue Ridge Parkway, the reconstructed Mabry Mill ground grain and mountain people demonstrated crafts. The glassmaking furnace at Jamestown was under construction. Indians wove at Lassen Volcanic National Park and worked catlinite for pipes at Pipestone National Monument.[25]

Historic firearms demonstrations, which would play a major part in the Service's living history programs, were inaugurated at Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park and Antietam National Battlefield Site in 1961 and soon spread to other military areas. Fort Davis National Historic Site was apparently the first such park, in 1965, to dress

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[24]Harold C. Bryant and Wallace W. Atwood, Jr., Research and Education in the National Parks (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), p. 10; King, "Interpretational Devices," Report of Meeting of Custodians, Southwestern National Monuments, Feb. 14-16, 1940, History Division.

[25]Memorandum, Chief, Division of Interpretation, Ronald F. Lee to All Field Offices, "Demonstrations as Part of the Interpretive Program," Feb. 7, 1956, Interpretive Programs file, History Division.

interpreters in period uniforms.

Congress was then considering legislation to add Hubbell Trading Post to the National Park System. Situated on the Navajo Indian Reservation in Arizona, the traditional post had been active until the 1950s and retained a rich collection of art, furnishings, and documents. Director Hartzog spoke in favor of the acquisition at a House of Representatives subcommittee hearing on June 21, 1965. Going beyond his prepared testimony, "Hartzog caught everyone by surprise by vowing not to have another dead and embalmed historical area," as Bob Utley later recalled the occasion. He declared that the Service would maintain the post in operation, a commitment carried out by planners and managers after Hubbell entered the System as a national historic site soon afterward.[26]

The Service moved more systematically into living history following a proposal by Marion Clawson, a Resources for the Future program director, in the April 1965 issue of Agricultural History. Clawson's article called for a national system of 25 to 50 operating historical farms under federal sponsorship, illustrating a variety of regions and historical periods. He brought his proposal to the attention of Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall, Secretary of Agriculture Orville L. Freeman, and S. Dillon Ripley, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Udall endorsed the concept, and Roy E. Appleman, one of the Service's leading historians, was assigned to represent the bureau at meetings with Clawson and representatives of the other agencies.[27]

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[26]Memorandum, Fritz Kessinger to Chief, Division of Legislation and Regulations, June 21, 1965, Legislation Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.; letter, Utley to author, Jan. 17, 1986.

[27]Clawson, "Living Historical Farms: A Proposal for Action," Agricultural History 39 (April 1965): 110-11; letter, Clawson to Udall,

Director Hartzog called the living historical farm program "entirely consistent with our emphasis on trying to interpret the peaceful and inspirationally creative contributions of this country in the field of history, to complement the great emphasis that has been placed so far on birthplaces and battlefields." He supported cooperation with the Agriculture Department, but his adversary relationship with the Smithsonian Institution led him to question "how the Smithsonian fits in." Hartzog's interest was stimulated by the Smithsonian's grant application to Resources for the Future for a living farm study. Motivated by their director's desire to head off the Smithsonian, Appleman and other Service officials met in July 1966 to plan how the Service might assume the lead role. In so doing they identified a number of National Park System areas with potential for living farm development: Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial; Sagamore Hill, Fort Vancouver, and Whitman Mission national historic sites; George Washington Birthplace, George Washington Carver, and Homestead national monuments; Big Bend and Great Smoky Mountains national parks; Theodore Roosevelt National Memorial Park; Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area; Piscataway Park; and the proposed Cumberland Island National Seashore.[28]

The Smithsonian received $18,475 from Resources for the Future and carried out its study, which, in Appleman's view, ignored the Service in favor of Smithsonian leadership and bureaucratic expansion. Anticipating this outcome, the Service proceeded independently. In September Appleman

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Aug. 11, 1965, Living Historical Farms file, History Division; letter, Udall to Clawson, Sept. 9, 1965, ibid.

[28]Memorandum, Hartzog to Howard W. Baker, Howard R. Stagner, and Theodor R. Swem, Apr. 18, 1966, Living Historical Farms file, History Division; memorandum, Appleman to Hartzog, July 18, 1966, ibid.

met with a master plan team at George Washington Birthplace to convey Hartzog's interest that its plan incorporate a living historical farm. An operating farm had been considered there in the mid-1950s, but Ronald Lee had concluded, "[T]here are definite drawbacks to such a development, and it is doubtful if it is a sound, or necessary, interpretive adjunct." Charles E. (Pete) Shedd, Jr., a team member, was now concerned that the farm might overshadow the memorial nature of the site. Evidently his concern was allayed: Appleman reported "agreement that there was no danger of this happening," and plans for the birthplace farm proceeded.[29]

The living farm at Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, Indiana, received high priority when Rep. Winfield K. Denton, chairman of the House of Representatives subcommittee handling Park Service appropriations, sought to boost tourism to that site in his congressional district. Hartzog responded with alacrity, and Edwin C. Bearss, the Service's most prolific research historian, was assigned in late 1966 to compile historical data for the development. Superintendent Albert W. Banton, Jr., moved swiftly to incorporate Bearss' findings on the ground. "Al Banton has created a new park at Lincoln Boyhood," the NPS Interpreters' Newsletter reported in November 1968. "Previously, the emphasis was on monumental memorialization totally divorced from the life Lincoln led there. Now we have a cabin and outbuildings and crops and animals and a fine idea of the environment in which the nation's most illustrious son

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[29]Memorandum, Appleman to Hartzog, Dec. 15, 1967, Living Historical Farms file, History Division; memorandum, Lee to All Field Offices, Feb. 7, 1956, Interpretive Programs file, History Division; memorandum, Appleman to Chief of Interpretation and Visitor Services, Oct. 14, 1966, Living Historical Farms file, History Division.

grew up."[30]

At Booker T. Washington National Monument, Virginia, little remained of the tobacco farm where Washington had been born in slavery, and despite a MISSION 66 visitor center, few visitors came. In 1967 its historian, H. Gilbert Lusk, proposed to increase its appeal with reconstructed farm buildings and period crops and livestock. Bearss did another study and inspired Lusk's successor, Barry Mackintosh, to supplement it with further research on local agricultural practices. "[Visitors] will be encouraged to participate in everything to the maximum extent possible--all part of the belief that we can better understand the past by reliving it ourselves, even if only for a moment," Mackintosh wrote of the living farm in progress at his park.[31] Hartzog encouraged the development and continued to push others, including a mountain farm at Great Smoky Mountains and the Oxon Hill Children's Farm, begun by National Capital Parks in 1967 outside Washington.

The living farm concept accelerated other living history activity in the Service. The Washington office requested that all regions experiment with interpreters in period dress during the summer of 1967. The response was mixed. Superintendent Franklin G. Smith of Fort Davis, where historic Army uniforms had been worn since 1965, called the clothing "an automatic ice-breaker" with visitors. But Superintendent Melvin J. Weig of Edison National Historic Site protested the idea of having interpreters in

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[30]Conversation with Edwin C. Bearss, Dec. 13, 1985; Bearss, Lincoln Boyhood as a Living Historical Farm (Washington: National Park Service, 1967); NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, Nov. 15, 1968, p. 11.

[31]Bearss, The Burroughs Plantation as a Living Historical Farm (Washington: National Park Service, 1969); Mackintosh, General Background Studies: The Burroughs Plantation, 1856-1865 (Washington: National Park Service, 1968); quote from NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, April 1969, p. 9.

Edison's laboratory wear lab coats, fearing they would destroy "the usefulness of the standard uniform as a means of establishing better identity" between the Service and the site. Superintendent Granville B. Liles of the Blue Ridge Parkway cautioned, "We want to be sure that dress and demonstrations contribute to the interpretive objectives of the area and are not merely ends in themselves, to compete with the many historical 'attractions' which rely heavily on dress and demonstrations in striving to evoke atmosphere."[32]

Hartzog pressed forward, that October suggesting "a program of living interpretation at each of our historic areas, where appropriate, that would involve the making of products for sale through the history associations." He requested status reports from Bill Everhart on his interpretive goals for 1968 and 1969, including six more living farms and 16 new demonstrations in period dress. The high-level interest was made known throughout the System as all parks were asked to report on their progress with "living interpretation," the newly favored term.[33]

Forty-one areas reported some such activity in 1968. Along with uniformed military drill and firing, Saratoga National Historical Park staged 18th-century cooking, baking, sewing, and candlemaking demonstrations. Costumed women at Hopewell Village National Historic Site dipped candles and baked bread. At the Yorktown end of Colonial National Historical Park there was spinning and weaving. In 1969 William Taylor, an

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[32]Memorandum, Acting Assistant Director Leslie P. Arnberger to All Regional Directors, Apr. 27, 1967, NPSHC; NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, Apr. 1, 1968, p. 3.

[33]Follow-up Slip, Hartzog to Harthon L. Bill, Howard W. Baker, and William C. Everhart, Oct. 4, 1967, NPSHC; memorandum, Everhart to All Regional Directors, Oct. 6, 1967, ibid.; memorandum, Hartzog to Everhart, May 24, 1968, ibid.

interpreter at Arches National Monument, had a second grade teacher and her class spend a day in old-time dress at a park cabin, emulating a pioneer family. Two years later Taylor, then in the Western Regional Office, inaugurated an Environmental Living Program at Fort Point National Historic Site: a summer camp group spent a day and night there drilling, doing guard duty, and eating 19th-century rations. The program proved popular and was extended to John Muir National Historic Site and Tumacacori National Monument.[34]

The Service began publishing a brochure in 1970 listing those areas with living history programs. By 1974, 114 areas had jumped on the bandwagon in some fashion. Reporting on the trend in 1973, Bill Everhart assessed it in glowing terms: "NPS in recent years has stressed the need to make history come alive. As a result, almost every historical park has introduced living history programs.... These innovative approaches have greatly enhanced visitor appreciation and substantially improved the quality of NPS interpretation."[35]

At least one living history demonstration drew public dissent. The Women's Christian Temperance Union attacked the Service's operation of whiskey stills in mountain life interpretation at Great Smoky Mountains and Cumberland Gap National Historical Park. The Southeast Regional Office thereupon sent a warning to its park superintendents: "No such still should be set up as a single interpretive device that might be misconstrued as a monument to the distilling industry, legal or otherwise.

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[34]"'Live-ins' Spread from West to East as Students Re-create History," History News, March 1974, pp. 68-69.

[35]Everhart, "A Report on National Park Service Interpretation," March 1973, NPSHC.

The still must be part of an integrated program illustrating many phases of pioneer life." Superintendents were further warned of the need for written authorization from the Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms Division of the Internal Revenue Service for such operations, in which denaturant was required to render the product unpotable.[36]

Living history attracted more fundamental criticism from other sources, especially within the Service. Historian George E. Davidson of Vicksburg National Military Park, a military buff who enjoyed participating in the weapons demonstrations there, nevertheless worried about the tone of the activity. "Very frankly, the somber words recalling the horror and tragedy of it all do not quite match the vigorous thrust of living history demonstrations in promoting a positive attitude toward our martial tradition," he wrote in 1970. In that era of Vietnam War protest, Davidson foresaw such demonstrations coming under attack and feared that the Service would be unable to defend them.[37]

Frank Barnes, interpretive specialist for the Northeast Region with a distinguished career in the field, delivered a thoughtful analysis of living history at the Mather Training Center in April 1973. "Our currently over-stressed living history activities may just possibly represent a tremendous failure on the part of our traditional interpretive programs --above all, a cover-up for lousy personal services," he said. "[T]he worst and the most unfortunate in its misleadingness" was the program at Booker T. Washington National Monument: "[T]he Booker T. Washington farm comes out as a charming scene, of course, complete with farm animals with

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[36]Memorandum, Acting Director Charles S. Marshall, Southeast Region, to Superintendents, Southeast Region, Oct. 27, 1971, NPSHC.

[37]NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, August 1970, p. 6.

picturesque names, with almost no indication of the social environmental realities of slave life (indeed, how far can you go with 'living slavery'?)." He scored too-clean restorations like Hopewell Village and battlefield programs conveying an impression of fun: "...the battlefield where authentic camp life (but without an enemy to worry about) and safe firings, sometimes skirmishes and misleadingly misnamed 'sum fun' almost make it so attractive that one wonders why more people don't take up a military career." As a positive alternative to these approaches, Barnes cited the American Museum of Immigration's blown-up photo of New York's Lower East Side circa 1900, "cluttered with immigrants and their life--immediately more honest and interpretive than the ethnicly dressed mannequins a few cubicles away and certainly more so than cheerful latter-day descendants dancing ethnic dances on the outside grounds." He urged refocus on message and meaning rather than media and techniques.[38]

As early as 1968 Peter H. Bennett, a visiting Canadian parks official, had criticized the popular Meeks Store restoration at Appomattox Court House National Historical Park, where a costumed clerk sold old-time candy and sundries to visitors. "While I found the country store very interesting and very attractively done, I got the impression that it was so good that it tended to distract from the rather solemn and very important general message that otherwise was put across very effectively," Bennett wrote. Historians Robert Utley, Roy Appleman, and John Luzader came to share Bennett's concern about appropriateness after a 1969 trip to Saratoga: "We had the impression that the park interpretive program lacks balance--that too much time of personnel is spent on fadism, the

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[38]Barnes, "Living Interpretation," April 1973, NPSHC. ("Sum Fun" was a summer program for children at Richmond National Battlefield Park.)

demonstration of musket use that in itself contributes little to visitor understanding of the park and its significance."[39] In 1974 Utley repeated the theme in a general critique of living history published in In Touch, the interpreters' newsletter:

> I fear that we have let the public's enthusiasm for living history push us from interpretation of the park's features and values into productions that, however entertaining, do not directly support the central park themes.... Inappropriate living history, moreover, is not merely harmless diversion. The more "living" it is, the more likely it is to give the visitor his strongest impression, and memory, of his park experience. Thus a program that is not unusually supportive of key interpretive objectives may be correspondingly distractive if not actually subversive. We are obsessed with showing what everyday life was like in the past.... But most of our historic places are not preserved because of the everyday life that occurred there. The visitor whose fascination with "living" portrayals of everyday activity inhibits his understanding and appreciation of the momentous significance of Lee's surrender to Grant, or the progress and consequences of the Battle of Saratoga, has not been well served by our interpretive program, no matter how well conceived and presented.[40]

Historian Nicholas J. Bleser of Tumacacori National Monument, himself an early practitioner of living history, wrote to applaud Utley's critique:

> "Living history" is but one of several bandwagons upon which the Service has leaped with gay abandon.... As future bandwagons arrive, we should slow them down and study them a bit before climbing aboard. I am personally convinced that we still need areas in the Service that allow visitors the freedom and privacy necessary to arrive at their own conclusions.... Perhaps they'd prefer to walk with ghosts in silence for a change.[41]

Interpreters often presented living history as "reliving the past"

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[39]Bennett quote in NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, Apr. 1, 1968, p. 9; Appleman, "Trip Report to Revolutionary War and Bicentennial Related Areas, Northeast Region," July 1969, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission file, History Division.

[40]Utley, "Living History: How Far Is Too Far?" In Touch, June 1974, pp. 13-14.

[41]In Touch, August 1974, pp. 15-16.

and invited their audience to "step back in time." In another In Touch contribution, Marcella Sherfy of the History Division in Washington warned against such pretenses when, in fact, only certain physical details or aspects of the past could be reenacted:

> Even having steeped ourselves in the literature of the period, worn its clothes, and slept on its beds, we never shed [present] perspectives and values. And from those perspectives and values, we judge and interpret the past. We simply cannot be another person and know his time as he knew it or value what he valued for his reasons.... Time past has, very simply, passed.[42]

Perhaps the ultimate in irrelevance was reached at Fort Caroline National Memorial in 1977, when the recorded spinet music mentioned before was carried a step further. (To appreciate this accomplishment, it is necessary to know that the significance of Fort Caroline was geopolitical --relating to French-Spanish competition for North America--and that no keyboard instruments were likely to have been present at the rough military outpost.) A correspondent from the memorial described the achievement:

> What do you do to bring the visitor a little closer to the story of your site, when the major historic resource [the fort] is missing?...
>
> It is known that musicians were among the French settlers.... To help the visitor understand this personal side of the struggle, we use a harpsichord borrowed from Cape Hatteras, and with the talents of a local college student, we present music of the period. It is with this musical tie we hope to bring the 16th-century struggle a little closer to the 20th-century visitor.[43]

By this time those overseeing interpretive affairs were well aware of such abuses and had taken steps to curtail them. "We have had to establish firm guidelines to insure that all living history programs achieve high standards of historical accuracy and that they directly relate to the central historical theme or association of the park,"

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[42] In Touch, May 1976, p. 5.

[43] In Touch, July 1977, p. 19.

reported Bill Dunmire, the Service's chief of interpretation, in 1975.[44] (Evidently the guidelines were lost in the mail to Fort Caroline.) The 1980 edition of the Service's Interpretation Guideline (NPS-6) refined the standards for living history in a manner clearly reflecting the critics' concerns. Excerpts:

> [I]nterpretive presentations [i.e., demonstrations, living history] are frequently personnel and cost intensive; they are more easily and inappropriately treated as educational or entertainment ends in themselves rather than as vehicles for sparking further public interest in park resources; they have a greater potential to be out of step with principal park themes....
>
> In parks established to commemorate major historical figures, specific events, or political/military actions and ideas, interpretive presentations that illustrate period lifestyles will usually not be appropriate [e.g., crafts at a battlefield]....
>
> All presentations dealing with history and prehistory must meet criteria for honesty as well as accuracy. Specifically:
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> - Presentations are not described or advertised as portraying "the past" but as limited illustrations of some scattered elements of previous activity, skills or crafts.
> - "Facts," examples, and anecdotes are not selected or used out of context to make a particular point or to communicate personal or contemporary social and political beliefs.
> - The reactions of historic people to past ideas and events are described in the context of past ideas and perceptions. We do not assume or suggest that historic people reacted to or felt about certain situations the way that we would unless there is strong evidence to support that pattern.
> - Costumes, equipment, speech patterns, etc., are specifically described to the public as being the most accurate reproductions we are able to obtain, rather than as "just like they had."
> - The individual experiences, events, or ideas being presented are chosen and expressed in such a way as to portray the full contributions or "personalities" of the ethnic groups, cultures, or people whose history is being commemorated.[45]

Instances of inappropriate programs would continue. Overall, however, the reexamination forced by the criticism and guidelines had good effect. As with visitor centers, it was finally realized that not every

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[44]"Report on Interpretation," NPSHC.

[45]Chapter 7, pp. 9-11.

park needed living history for effective interpretation.

Environmental Interpretation

Among the postwar trends in natural interpretation was a gradual shift from a "cataloging" approach, stressing names of and facts about a park's natural features, to an ecological approach emphasizing their interrelationships. According to Bill Dunmire, "Progressive park naturalists in the 50's would have been perfectly comfortable with the word 'ecology' and its implications, long before it became fashionable with the general public."[46] Observers of ecological relationships were especially sensitive to the ways in which man's actions often degraded the natural environment, a mounting concern during the 1960s. Many in the Service who shared this concern felt that the bureau could do more to stimulate public awareness of environmental problems and action to combat them.

Writing in the NPS Interpreters' Newsletter in December 1967, Bill Everhart, assistant director for interpretation, declared that interpreting park resources to park visitors was not enough:

> First, our interpretive programs have traditionally been limited to the parks themselves. We have concentrated mostly on telling the park story to visitors in the parks....
>
> Secondly, we have had a tendency to interpret a park in terms of its resources. We have not effectively carried out an educational campaign to further the general cause of conservation.... Only through an environmental approach to interpretation can an organization like ours, which has both Yosemite and the Statue of Liberty, achieve its purpose of making the park visitor's experience fully significant.[47]

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[46]Letter, Dunmire to Edwin C. Bearss and Barry Mackintosh, Feb. 13, 1986.

[47]NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, Dec. 15, 1967, p. 2.

Beginning in 1968, the Service worked with Mario Menesini, director of the Educational Consulting Service, on National Environmental Education Development (NEED) materials for schools. NEED was intended to develop environmental awareness and values through the application of five "strands": (1) variety and similarities, (2) patterns, (3) interrelation and interdependence, (4) continuity and change, (5) adaptation and evolution. These strands were supposed to be woven into all subjects taught in the schools--and all park interpretive programs. Parks were encouraged to establish Environmental Study Areas (ESAs), to be visited by school classes using the NEED materials. Sixty-three parks, ranging from Appomattox Court House and Natchez Trace Parkway to Jefferson National Expansion Memorial and Grand Teton, had ESAs by 1970, and 25 more were then planned.

Raymond L. Nelson, supervisor of the Mather Training Center from 1967 to 1970, was a strong proponent of environmental interpretation. Under his inspirational leadership, the courses in oral, written, and audio-visual communications presented to Service interpreters were geared to the NEED strands. All papers and talks prepared by the attendees on their parks were to incorporate environmental themes. For natural park interpreters, this approach came naturally. Those charged with interpreting battlefields, birthplaces, and other historic sites found it more challenging.

Among the dissenters was James W. Sheire, a Service historian with the Eastern Service Center in Washington. In a 1970 letter to the NPS Interpreters' Newsletter he vented the frustration shared by many in his profession:

> I would most respectfully ask our environmental enthusiasts to

> please, please leave the historical areas alone. There is nothing ecological about most of them. They were established to commemorate a significant person, event, or period in American history. They should be interpreted according to the discipline of history, not ecology. Unfortunately, the quality of our historical interpretation at these areas has reached an almost shameful level.... If only a portion of that energy and enthusiasm displayed by our environmental interpreters was directed to interpreting, e.g., Carl Sandburg's life and art or Thomas Edison's position in the history of American technology, we would have a top flight interpretive program at such areas. We do not. Instead, it is my fear that we will now have Haiku at Colonial, "web of life" at Herbert Hoover, and child sensitivity training at Ft. Laramie.[48]

But the movement was then at its flood, the first Earth Day coming in 1970. Capitalizing on the national sentiment and publicity, Q. Boyd Evison, chief of the new Division of Environmental Projects at Harpers Ferry Center, established an Environmental Education Task Force "to expedite the establishment of an environmental education program that is integral to operations at all levels of the National Park Service--a program which will also assist public and private organizations concerned with the promotion of a national environmental ethic."[49]

In 1972 another new unit in the Washington headquarters, the Office of Environmental Interpretation under Vernon C. (Tommy) Gilbert, Jr., negotiated a cooperative park studies unit agreement with George Williams College, near Chicago. Its objectives were "the administration of a program designed to study effective environmental education, interpretation, and sociological aspects of park programs in cooperation with the College and participation in a related program of undergraduate and graduate studies." This affiliation resulted from Director Hartzog's desire to bring the Service's environmental education programs to urban

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[48]NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, September 1970, p. 9.

[49]Evison, "Environmental Education--Where We Stand," NPS Interpreters' Newsletter, March 1970, p. 3.

areas and initiatives by Nelson Wieters and Steven Van Matre, George Williams faculty involved with the movement.[50]

Steven H. Lewis, who had instructed Service interpreters at Mather Training Center, moved to the campus in October and inaugurated a two-level training program there for Service employees. Seven interpretive supervisors at the GS-9 level began a year of study leading to a master's degree in environmental education administration. Some 35 urban intake trainees, just hired or with brief park experience, came for a month at George Williams before proceeding or returning to their parks. The students spent some time at the college's field campus in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, and a week working in inner-city Chicago schools.

During two academic years, the program graduated 14 students with master's degrees and schooled 104 intake trainees. But Ronald H. Walker, Hartzog's successor in 1973, did not share Hartzog's enthusiasm for environmental education and judged the program lacking in cost-effectiveness. It was not renewed after Lewis left for another assignment in March 1974. The program had been valuable in exposing Service employees to an urban situation. But it did not succeed in strengthening environmental education or reorienting careers, as hoped--few were motivated to seek out urban assignments. Nor was there any long-term follow-up to see that the graduates were used effectively in the field for which they had been trained.[51]

In 1975 the NEED program was rounded out with the publication of

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[50]"Master Memorandum of Understanding Between George Williams College, Downers Grove, Ill., and National Park Service, United States Department of the Interior," Washington Office file K1815, WNRC; telephone conversation with Steven H. Lewis, Sept. 17, 1985.

[51]Lewis conversation.

curriculum materials for kindergarten through second grade and fifth grade, funded by the National Park Foundation. Eighty parks then had one or more ESAs, used by some 180,600 students from 202 school systems throughout the country. By this time environmental interpretation for other visitors had matured to a less self-conscious function. Bill Dunmire, chief of interpretation, saw its greatest contribution as "the injection of a new methodology--that of involving visitors in our interpretive events, not as mere spectators but as participants." He cited a "slough slog" at Everglades National Park and an ecology float trip at Yosemite as examples of successful "immersion programs" contributing to environmental awareness. "The new breed of interpreters are finding that the more visitors will participate by using all their senses, by making their own discoveries and by getting into the thick of any given environment, the more they will carry away from the experience," he wrote.[52]

As late as 1979 Assistant Secretary of the Interior Robert L. Herbst declared environmental education "an essential management function for every park...." But a back-to-basics movement, inspired by financial retrenchment and a belief that the Service was lagging in more traditional responsibilities, would soon affect this and other special programs. In March 1982 Director Russell E. Dickenson endorsed and circulated a paper by Bill Dunmire's successor, Vernon D. (Dave) Dame, that frowned on programs not directly based on park resources or extending too far beyond them. "These can be exciting programs, but our job is to interpret the resources and themes of our parks, not to function as subject matter

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[52]Dunmire, "Report on Interpretation," NPSHC; Dunmire, "Environmental Education: A Cornerstone of Park Interpretation," Trends, April-May-June 1975, p. 4.

educators or as spokespeople for special causes," Dame wrote.[53] Fifteen years before, Bill Everhart had complained that the Service was mostly interpreting park resources to park visitors. No longer was this deemed inadequate.

Environmental interpretation at historical areas was also reassessed. Looking back in 1985, Dame--a naturalist by background--judged "ridiculous" the imposition of NEED strands on parks like Independence.[54] Few historians would disagree.

Women in Interpretation

Interpretation has been a primary avenue for the employment and advancement of women professionals in the National Park Service, an organization traditionally personified by the masculine ranger.

Isabelle F. Story joined the Service at its inception in 1917 as an editorial assistant and soon assumed responsibility for information and public relations, functions closely related to interpretation. For many years before her retirement in 1956, she was the only female chief on the director's staff.

In the field, the Service licensed young women employed by local hotels to nature-guide in Rocky Mountain National Park in 1917. Three years later Yellowstone hired Isobel Bassett, trained in geology, as a seasonal ranger to help inaugurate the interpretive program there. She was succeeded in 1921 by Mary A. Rolfe, a teacher. Herma Albertson

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[53]Herbst quote in Trends, Winter 1979, p. 2; Dame, "The Role and Responsibility of Interpretation in the 1980's," enclosure to memorandum, Dickenson to Regional Directors and Superintendents. "Interpretation and Visitor Services," Mar. 29, 1982, NPSHC.

[54]Conversation with Dame, Oct. 22, 1985.

Baggley served as a seasonal ranger-naturalist in Yellowstone from 1928 to 1930 and joined the permanent staff in 1931, becoming the first permanent woman naturalist in the Service. At Yosemite, Enid Michael volunteered in the nature guide program in 1920 and served as a seasonal ranger-naturalist on the park staff from 1921 to 1943.[55]

Women were long prominent in historic preservation activity outside the Service, but the bureau did not become broadly receptive to female historical interpreters until the late 1950s. Even then they were something of a novelty. "Each year more consideration is given to the employment of women in certain types of interpretive programs, such as historic houses," Ronald Lee noted in a 1959 paper on "What's New in Interpretation."[56]

The next year Roy Appleman was impressed by a conversation with Maria Lombard, who organized and operated the guided tours at Rockefeller Center in New York City. She had originally used young men but found them too independent and hard to control. Young women (preferably ages 18-25) were far more satisfactory: they were natural hostesses, more outgoing, "much better at any task which is of a repetitive nature..., more susceptible to instruction, more obedient, and...less of a management problem...." Appleman agreed with her opinion of male guides: "My own experience of guided tours and similar work in the National Park Service is that men are not effective at it. In uniform, they stand around looking like guards, and they act like guards. They are not outgoing, and they do not initiate conversation. They lack warmth." He recommended

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[55]Brockman, "Park Naturalists and the Evolution of National Park Service Interpretation," p. 32.

[56]Interpretive Programs file, History Division.

that the Service discontinue hiring men for guide work and employ only women "whenever the conditions will warrant a woman holding the job."[57]

Appleman again championed female employment in drafting the director's 1962 annual report:

> There has been an increasing awareness on the part of many in the Service that women do certain public service and interpretive work better than men. They are better suited psychologically, studies in industry have proven, to perform duties of a repetitive and routine nature.... The most extensive experiment in the use of women thus far in this type of work has been at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, where it seems to be working well.... On the basis of present experiments and studies, it would appear that the Service will make an increased and expanding use of women in its interpretive work.[58]

The women at Independence were park guides, a sub-professional job classification not requiring the college background necessary for park naturalists and historians. In the mid-1960s women began to be hired and trained for the latter jobs on a servicewide basis. By the 1980s they equaled or exceeded men in interpretive positions--and not just those of a repetitive and routine nature.

As women have made their mark in interpretation, they have broadened what is interpreted. Female interpreters at Morristown National Historical Park have lately conducted special programs on women in the Revolution, illustrated there by both camp followers and those left to manage family farms while the men were fighting. At Civil War battlefields like Gettysburg and Pea Ridge national military parks they have focused less on battle tactics and more on the battles' effects on homes and communities. At Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park they have included the

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[57]Memorandum, Appleman to Lee, Sept. 26, 1960, NPSHC.

[58]Memorandum, Appleman to Herbert E. Kahler, Chief, Division of History and Archeology, June 19, 1962, History Division.

story of women in the Alaska gold rush.[59] Care must be taken that undue emphasis is not given tangential female roles at the expense of primary park themes. With this caution observed, the presence of women has desirably expanded and enriched interpretive content.

Other Agendas

The primary purpose of park interpretation, it might be assumed, is to communicate the natural and historical significance of parks to the public. From time to time, Service management has sought to use interpretation to communicate other messages and serve other purposes. Similarly, Service interpreters and their chiefs have sometimes sought to justify their positions and programs based on their utility to management.

This tendency to have interpretation serve other agendas was especially pronounced during World War II, when the nation's focus on defense diverted support for the parks and occasionally threatened park resources having potential military application. Even before America's entry into the war, Service leaders strove to demonstrate that the parks were important to the cause. With their encouragement, the Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments passed a resolution in November 1940 proclaiming the patriotic value of park interpretation:

> [T]he Advisory Board believes the National Park Service's interpretative program in national park areas, particularly the historical parks and monuments and the great national scenic areas, is one of the most valuable contributions by any Federal agency in promoting patriotism, in sustaining morale, and understanding of the fundamental principles of American democracy, and in inspiring love for our country. The Advisory Board would therefore suggest that the National Park Service's interpretative program should be

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[59]Telephone conversation with Polly W. Kaufman, Dec. 17, 1985.

> expanded by every means including publications, radio, motion pictures, guide service, park museums, etc., during this period of national exigency. It further recommends the National Park Service should immediately undertake the encouragement of national pride in our new armed forces as well as our citizenry, which is so essential for the defense and preservation of our country.[60]

Simultaneously, historical area superintendents in Region One (east of the Mississippi) received guidance on interpretive content from their regional office:

> All types of historical park literature should place greater emphasis upon the principles of freedom, democracy, and self rule that underlie the basic political philosophy of the American people and our constitution.... The possibilities inherent in the history of each area should be carefully studied in this connection and a positive statement made in the interpretive literature relating to the area....
>
> In the guided tours of school groups patriotism and appreciation of American traditions should be emphasized.[61]

During the war parks near or en route to military bases and embarkation points were often visited by men in uniform. Eager to publicize its part in the war effort, the Service made much of such visits and encouraged their coverage by the press. Under the headline "Colonial National Park Bright Patriotic Shrine In All-Out War Program," the Newport News, Virginia, Daily Press reported in July 1942, "Hundreds of army men and boys conducted regularly by the park rangers and historians over the Yorktown battlefield, stand in reverence at the scene of another war and are awakened to a new realization of the true meaning of that battle and the present overall conflict in which they are now participating."[62]

In the last year of the war Service historian Charles W. Porter III

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[60]Advisory Board records, History Division.

[61]Letter, Acting Regional Director Fred T. Johnston to Superintendents, Historical Areas, Nov. 9, 1940, NPSHC.

[62]July 19, 1942, clipping, Wartime Use of National Parks file, History Division.

prepared an account of the bureau's contributions, again stressing patriotism:

> The individual citizens faced by a troubled world turned in the moment of national danger to the national historical parks and shrines for a renewal of their faith in the country's traditions and their country's destiny, for encouragement, and patriotic inspiration....
>
> It was felt that the best means of responding to the new public demand could be found in an intensification of the National Park Service interpretive program which had always aimed at a graphic, inspirational portrayal of the fundamentals of the American tradition. Intensification of the program was a matter of placing greater emphasis on those aspects of the historical story dealing with liberty, democracy and love of country, and of offering greater service....
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> In order to render the best possible service to visiting soldiers and sailors much was done to perfect and intensify the basic contribution of the historical and military parks to National morale. The oral and written interpretation of each historical area became the subject of careful examination and in many cases of revision in the interest of making the park story a direct contribution to the United Nations' program.[63]

To a much lesser extent, the Cold War also became a rationale for historical park interpretation. Before a joint session of the American Historical Association and American Association for State and Local History in 1950, Chief Historian Ronald Lee spoke of "the nation's need to understand its history--a need which is greater now, when our basic beliefs are challenged by an alien philosophy, than at any previous time."[64]

While wars (hot and cold) came and went, the need for park protection was constant, and interpretation was regularly enlisted in support of that battle. According to a 1945 manual for the custodians of the Southwestern National Monuments, "The effective custodian is the one who can include

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[63]Porter, "National Park Service War Work, December 7, 1941, to June 30, 1944," Wartime Use of National Parks file, History Division.

[64]Paper delivered Dec. 30, 1950, History Division.

in his interpretation an explanation of the need for protection and instill in the visitor sincere sympathy with the National Park Service protection and conservation philosophy."[65]

In 1953 Director Conrad L. Wirth elaborated on this strategy in a memorandum titled "Securing Protection and Conservation Objectives Through Interpretation." Interpretation could achieve these objectives, it declared, by presenting the facts of nature and history, sharing some guiding principles of park management, indicating desirable visitor behavior, and identifying major continuing threats to park integrity. It urged a conservation ingredient in all interpretive programs, kept in balance with the primary topic presented. (The memorandum remains so current, more than three decades later, that it is reproduced in full in the appendix.)[66]

Less laudably, the Service sometimes saw interpretation and related development as a means of publicizing itself. In 1957 John Littleton, an interpretive planner with the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, advocated visitor centers at the north and south ends of Gettysburg to reach visitors before the commercial establishments did:

> It would put the Park Service more in the forefront (where it should be) in the Gettysburg story. As it is now most visitors...never see the Park Service, never know who it is that does all the work of keeping the park in such fine condition....
>
> I hope the Service may make of Gettysburg one of its shining examples of MISSION 66 work. I don't see how we can afford very long to risk having the President take distinguished visitors to the Gettysburg battlefield, and perhaps never see the Park Service.[67]

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[65]Interpretive Programs file, History Division.

[66]Memorandum, Wirth to All Field Offices, Apr. 23, 1953, ibid.

[67]Memorandum, Littleton to Chief, EODC, June 14, 1957, Washington Office file K1815, WNRC.

Littleton's comment illustrates the self-promotional impulse that influenced visitor center development, sometimes producing centers of doubtful necessity and/or undue prominence. (Only one visitor center was built at Gettysburg, but it was a large structure, including park offices, intruding on a key battlefield locale.) A degree of self-promotion was also expected in interpretive presentations. In 1958 Ronald Lee called to the regional directors' attention several weaknesses in park campfire programs, among them no group singing, no campfires, and "too little mention of MISSION 66."[68]

A decade later came increasing calls for "relevance" in interpretation. Pete Shedd expressed the concern to a group of state park administrators in 1968:

> What are we doing to make our Nation's history relevant to today's world? Should we even try, or is that a dangerous course in the face of today's social, cultural, and political conflicts? We can, of course, fall back on the comforting knowledge that many people come to a historic site to escape the pressures and uncertainties of the present, and draw inspiration from the past. I hope and expect that this will always be true, but now we have visitors who come to parks to walk barefoot and strum guitars, or simply to escape even briefly from the ghetto or the crabgrass.... These visitors, particularly the young people with their carefully culivated cynicism, will not settle for a past that has no obvious relevance to the present.[69]

One manifestation of the drive for relevance was increased attention to racial and ethnic minorities. Parks reflecting the black, Hispanic, and Indian heritage were highlighted to show the Service's interest in serving these groups. In a 1973 report Bill Everhart called for greater sensitivity to cultural diversity in interpretation. Bob Utley, then

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[68]Memorandum, Lee to Regional Directors, Mar. 25, 1958, Washington Office file K1815, WNRC.

[69]Paper delivered Nov. 13, 1968, NPSHC.

director of the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, agreed but added a caution:

> In our new awareness of minority and ethnic roles in our history, we must rigorously guard against exaggerating them in an effort to atone for past neglect. With minorities taking on ever more political clout and not always restrained by an objective view of their own past, we shall often face powerful pressures that could produce distorted interpretation. The Kosciuszko affair is suggestive. At the moment areas featuring Indian-White relations are especially vulnerable.[70]

The "Servicewide Goals for Interpretation" for 1976 revealed the extent to which interpretation was then expected to carry other loads. Among them:

> [R]esource preservation themes should be incorporated wherever possible in interpretive programs.
>
> Interpretive programs should incorporate an energy conservation message, both in content and by example.
>
> Interpretive programs should strive for greater relevance to cultural minorities.
>
> The incorporation of environmental education concepts and techniques is basic to the development and operation of high quality interpretive programs.
>
> Interpretive programs in all parks should incorporate special Bicentennial activities during the year.

After all this, the edict advised, "Programs that are peripheral or unrelated to a park's primary interpretive themes...should be scrutinized for possible curtailment."[71]

The Service's management policy compilation published two years later suggested that communication of the parks' significance was only third among the purposes of interpretation:

> The purpose of interpretation in the National Park System is (1) to encourage thoughtful minimum impact use of the park's resources; (2)

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[70]Memorandum, Utley to Associate Director, Professional Services, Apr. 16, 1973, History Division. The "Kosciuszko affair" referred to the successful efforts of Polish-Americans to establish a national memorial to Thaddeus Kosciuszko, involving some embellishment of his reputation.

[71]In Touch, March 1976, pp. 2-3.

> to promote public understanding of the policies and programs of park management; and (3) to provide visitors with a foundation on which they can build an understanding and appreciation of parks and their significant natural, historic, and cultural values.[72]

The 1980 edition of NPS-6, the Interpretation Guideline, again placed management needs foremost. "The interpretation and visitor services program is an integral function of overall park management, and should be employed by management as one of the primary means of achieving those park objectives that directly affect or are affected by the visiting public," it stated. "To this end, all interpretation and visitor services programs should be reviewed and evaluated annually to insure that they are serving the current needs of park management, the park's resources, and the park's visitors." All parks were again directed to "integrate environmental/energy educational information and activities into their programs"--at the same time insuring that these messages were "accurate and relevant to the area's interpretive themes and resources."[73]

In 1985 Dave Dame, chief of interpretation at this writing, saw the function of interpretation "primarily to develop public support for preserving parks." The current director, William Penn Mott, Jr., has followed the tradition of setting additional interpretive agendas. He called for each park to mark the centennial of the Statue of Liberty in 1986 and the bicentennial of the Constitution in 1987. Taking a stance recalling the heyday of environmental education, he would also explain more than park resources to more than park visitors:

> [I]t seems to me we have a special role and obligation to extend the interpretive mission beyond the boundaries of the parks, into the schools and community, to inform and to relate the parks

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[72]Management Policies, 1978, Chapter 7, p. 2.

[73]Chapter 1, p. 1; Chapter 3, p. 3.

and their resources to the people whom they serve and for whom, ultimately, they are preserved and protected....

I think we need to expand the horizons of our interpretive message, not only to include at each park the message that there are many parks, but something of the meanings and relationships of those other elements to the National Park System as a whole.... But there are other messages we need to also tell--straightforward and without partisan embellishment--of conservation topics and issues elsewhere in the world, some of which hold portent of major opportunities or serious problems for the future. The subjects of acid rain; the desertification of lands in the tropics; the large-scale cutting of tropical rainforests; the search for places to safely store long-lived radioactive wastes; and so forth....

[T]here will be much more about interpretation in the months ahead.[74]

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[74]Conversation with Dame, Oct. 22, 1985; Mott, "Mission: Interpretation," Courier, November-December 1985, p. 3.

INTERPRETING INTERPRETATION

During its relatively brief history, much effort has gone into defining the nature and function of park interpretation and guiding its progress. Even while the term "education" was still being applied to interpretation, those involved with it were taking pains to distinguish it from traditional academic instruction. "Our function lies rather in the inspirational enthusiasm which we can develop among our visitors--an enthusiasm based upon a sympathetic interpretation of the main things that the parks represent, whether these be the wonder of animate things living in natural communities, or the story of creation as written in the rocks, or the history of forgotten races as recorded by their picturesque dwellings," a guideline distributed by the Education Division in 1929 declared. It urged simple presentations "that will make even the most complicated natural phenomena understandable to visitors from all walks of life," and communication of concepts rather than data: "Beware of merely giving names or introducing a great number of irrelevant observations. Leave your party with natural history ideas rather than with a catalog of facts."[1]

The Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks (page 15) provided similar advice later that year. "It should be the primary object of the educational work to make possible the maximum of understanding and appreciation of the greater characteristic park features

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[1]General Plan of Administration for the Educational Division, June 4, 1929, History of Interpretation files, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry, W. Va. (hereinafter cited as NPSHC).

by the visitor, together with the stimulation of his thinking," the committee recommended. "Educational work should be reduced to the lowest limit which will give the visitor opportunity to discover the things of major interest, and to inform himself fully concerning them if he so desires."[2]

In 1940 Service archeologist Dale King counseled sensitivity in interpretation to the custodians of the Southwestern National Monuments:

> We must lead...so [visitors] do not know they are following. We must not herd our charges like a group of cattle. We must present our wares so enticingly that the visitor himself desires to partake of them, and so subtly is he influenced that he does not realize that his action is drawn out by a carefully laid plan. And if there are visitors who wish to make their way undisturbed by formal guides and guiding, we must perfect a technique so that these "untouchables" are unruffled by the little man who is there in the green uniform....[3]

Like others before and after, King urged interpreters to focus on significance:

> Let us try to analyze our monuments in terms of their real meaning and importance. Let us attempt to stress those parts of their story which have some lasting value and significance. We can't expect John Q. Public to go away and remember forever that the compound wall is 219 feet, six inches long, or that the thumb print is to the right of the little door in Room No. 24. We can try to make the people of that vanished historic or prehistoric period live again in his mind. Give him some insight into their troubles and joys, show him that they were human, and underline their differences from us as well as their likenesses to us. In other words, build understanding, and, eventually, tolerance.[4]

During and after the 1950s, the Service made a more concerted effort

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[2]Reports with Recommendations from the Committee on Study of Educational Problems in the National Parks, January 9, 1929, and November 7, 1929 (n.p., n.d.), p. 4.

[3]"Scope and Function of the Interpretation Program of the Southwestern National Monuments," in Report of Meeting of Custodians, Southwestern National Monuments, Feb. 14-16, 1940, History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

[4]Ibid.

to instruct its personnel in the techniques of interpretation. In November 1952 Director Wirth approved a proposal from Ronald Lee for a training program "emphasizing the improvement of oral interpretive presentations and the use of new audio-visual equipment." First to be trained were supervisors from Region One the following March.[4] In 1957 a Service school covering the range of field operations, including interpretation, opened at Yosemite National Park, where the old Yosemite School of Field Natural History had functioned from 1925 to 1953. It was succeeded in 1963 by the permanent Horace M. Albright and Stephen T. Mather training centers at Grand Canyon and Harpers Ferry respectively. Mather Training Center, specializing in interpretation, opened with a session for advanced interpreters that spring and held its first full nine-week course for 36 trainees in the fall.

Between 1953 and 1955 the Service published four booklets on interpretive techniques: Talks and Conducted Trips by Howard R. Stagner, chief of interpretation in the Natural History Division; Campfire Programs by H. Raymond Gregg, chief of interpretation in the Omaha regional office; and Information Please. These training aids, intended principally for seasonal interpreters, were widely distributed and contained good practical advice on their topics.

In October 1954 the Service asked Paul Mellon's Old Dominion Foundation for a $30,000 grant to support a "reappraisal of the basic principles which underlie the program of nature and historical interpretation in the National Park System." The grant was approved the following February, and Freeman Tilden, a creative thinker and writer on park topics, embarked on

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[4]Memorandum, Lee to Wirth, Nov. 3, 1952, NPSHC.

the project.[5] In the course of it he led tours at Castillo de San Marcos National Monument and observed many programs elsewhere. The result was Interpreting Our Heritage, published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1957.

Interpreting Our Heritage, distributed throughout and beyond the Service, remains the classic treatise on its subject. Tilden based it on six principles:

> I. Any interpretation that does not somehow relate what is being displayed or described to something within the personality or experience of the visitor will be sterile.
>
> II. Information, as such, is not Interpretation. Interpretation is revelation based on information. But they are entirely different things. However, all interpretation includes information.
>
> III. Interpretation is an art, which combines many arts, whether the materials presented are scientific, historical, or architectural. Any art is to some degree teachable.
>
> IV. The chief aim of Interpretation is not instruction, but provocation.
>
> V. Interpretation should aim to present a whole rather than a part, and must address itself to the whole man rather than any phase.
>
> VI. Interpretation addressed to children (say, up to the age of twelve) should not be a dilution of the presentation to adults, but should follow a fundamentally different approach. To be at its best it will require a separate program.[6]

Tilden continued his own interpretation of the parks, written and oral, and made inspirational presentations to the Service's interpretive trainees for years thereafter.

In 1962 the Service developed ten interpretive objectives. Couched in positive terms, most reflected shortcomings perceived in existing conditions and programs. Among them:

> Seek, develop, and test new methods, new interpretive tools, and new techniques. Adapt those which prove effective and are

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[5]Letter, Conrad L. Wirth to Paul Mellon, Oct. 1, 1954, Interpretive Programs file, History Division; letter, Ernest Brooks, Jr., to Wirth, Feb. 15, 1955, ibid.

[6]p. 9.

> appropriate to the concept of National Park interpretation, but resist the temptation to promote the novel for the sake of novelty.
>
> Raise the standards of recruitment and selection so as to obtain men of high competence and high potential as interpreters, with special emphasis on broad training in natural history, history and archeology,...coupled with great communications skills.
>
> Provide a progression of interpretive opportunities--in addition to, and above the common denominator level--to meet the needs of the better informed, more experienced, and the more seriously interested visitor....[7]

The last suggested that the pendulum had swung too far in response to earlier criticism that interpretation at some areas was overly addressed to specialists (pages 25-26). Tilden recognized that interpretation for children should be separate from that for adults, but he did not make a similar distinction between the "intelligent but uninformed" adults composing most audiences and adults who were both. Balance in serving these two equally different populations would be difficult to achieve, and "the more seriously interested visitor" continued to receive less attention in most cases.

The audience issue was addressed again in 1965 by a committee reviewing interpretive plans and development at the Service's western forts. Its statement on the subject could have been taken as a prescription for all interpretive programming, natural as well as historical:

> The term "visitor" represents in effect an illusion. There is no typical visitor. He is everything from a casual passerby to an avid buff, a scholarly historian, a professional military man, or a devoted antiquarian. He is all ages, from cradle-borne to escorted senility. His range of "experience" during a visit may be anything from indifference or boredom to mild curiosity, and on to a craving for even obscure detail of the story associated with the area. Any program may exceed the desires of the least interested; no program can satisfy the insatiable want of a small minority. But interpretive development need not pander to the former, nor seem impoverished to the latter. It is necessary to shape a program that strikes a middle course between the extremes. The questions of judgment and

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[7]Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments, records of 49th meeting, History Division.

> decision come into play and have to be resolved in a way that will result in an overall development which will appeal to, and be comprehensible by, the indifferent and poorly informed, as well as instructive and stimulating to the eager and more learned. The more capable will be introduced to avenues of further information and learning which they can pursue on their own. This is as much as Service responsibility need attempt.[8]

In April 1967 the Division of Interpretation and Visitor Services in Washington inaugurated a new communications medium for interpreters, the NPS Interpreters' Newsletter. William L. Perry was the editor; Ronald Greenberg assisted and later took over the job. The first issue of the quarterly contained news of the Washington office's interpretive organization and personnel, reprints of New York Times articles on Marshall McLuhan, word that Interpreting our Heritage was coming out in paperback, and bibliographic information. The second issue informed interpreters about the new thrust for costumed interpretation, mentioned the first minifolders to be published, and complained about the lack of contributions and constructive criticism from the field.

The newsletter was published monthly by 1970 but was discontinued with the December 1970 issue in a general cutback of Service publications. In April 1974 it was reborn as In Touch, subtitled "Interpreters Information Exchange." Roy Graybill of the Interpretation Division was "coordinator"; Keith Hoofnagle handled design and contributed outstanding cartoons. In keeping with the announced intent that In Touch would be "the voice of the park interpreter" rather than an organ of Washington and Harpers Ferry Center officials, Pete Shedd of the Southeast Region served as guest editor of the first issue.

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[8]Western Military Forts (Washington: National Park Service, 1965), pp. 9-10. The committee was chaired by Roy E. Appleman and included Jerry D. Wagers, Edward J. Bierly, and H. Raymond Gregg.

By the third issue Graybill was permanent editor. A year after its beginning he noted an absence of field contributions and urged more if the publication were to continue. It lived on until the beginning of 1981, when the contributions shortage proved fatal. In Touch nevertheless served a valuable purpose during its existence, communicating advice and inspiration on the hows, whats, and whys of interpretation and airing a healthy degree of dissension and disagreement with prevailing fads. Excerpts in the preceding chapter of this survey give some indication of its scope.

In Touch was revived in 1986--an indication of Director Mott's personal interest in interpretation.

INTERPRETATION IN CRISIS

There is a shortage of good interpreters, well grounded in their parks' subject matter and able to communicate skillfully to visitors. Personalized interpretation has declined in favor of canned presentations. Interpreters are out of the organizational mainstream, often overlooked for advancement. Managers consider interpretation nice but nonessential, cutting it first when funds are tight.

Interpretation is in crisis. But interpretation has always been in crisis, it seems. The foregoing could have been said--and often was--at any time during the postwar era. Freeman Tilden's observation to Director Wirth in 1952, when he first proposed his study of interpretation, is illustrative:

> Since 1942 I have travelled many thousands of miles, visiting a great number of areas, and my conviction that the Park Service flounders in the Interpretation field has steadily grown. By this, I do not mean that it is bad; on the contrary, considering the lack of a basic philosophy, perhaps it is amazingly good; but I think the entire personnel of the National Park Service would agree with me that it is far from good enough.[1]

That year there was a cutback in interpretive staffing and programs. Many historical parks lacked historians during the early 1950s. Some had guards, guides, and tour leaders whose qualifications were distinctly sub-professional; in 1954 the chief of interpretation, Ronald Lee, recommended "a determined effort...to weed out incompetents" by "raising the grades of these positions and securing better qualified personnel than most of

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[1]Letter, Tilden to Wirth, Sept. 23, 1952, Interpretive Programs file, History Division, National Park Service, Washington, D.C.

best copy available

the present incumbents." In 1960 Lee complained that of 261 interpreters in the Service (116 naturalists, 108 historians, 37 archeologists), only 9 were on the promotion list for superintendent--and 4 of these were former superintendents.[2]

The campfire program, inspired by the legendary campfire origins of the national park concept (pages 31-32), was long a favorite interpretive medium in parks with camping or otherwise drawing evening visitation. A doctoral student surveying park interpretation in 1948 noted a decline in the role of such programs below prewar levels. Naturalist Paul E. Schultz expressed concern about the trend in 1955: "To me it seems that to a considerable degree we have 'lost the touch' of vibrancy and informality characteristic of the traditional campfire. The truth is that the intimate campfire program is nearly a thing of the past"--superseded by more formal amphitheater programs with amplification and incidental or nonexistent fires.[3]

MISSION 66 funded numerous visitor centers and other interpretive facilities and media, but staffing and maintenance of the new facilities and devices did not keep pace. "[W]ith the emphasis on construction in recent years, I have observed some laxness in standards of personal service--and some disposition to sacrifice quality for quantity," Ronald Lee told a visitor services conference at Williamsburg in December 1959.

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[2]Memorandum, Lee to Director Conrad L. Wirth, Feb. 15, 1954, ibid.; memorandum, Lee to Assistant Director Hillory A. Tolson, Jan. 4, 1960, History of Interpretation files, National Park Service History Collection, Harpers Ferry, W. Va. (hereinafter cited as NPSHC).

[3]Wilson F. Clark, "National Parks Survey: The Interpretive Program of the National Parks; Their Development, Present Status, and Reception by the Public," unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cornell University, 1949; memorandum, Schultz to Ronald F. Lee, Oct. 24, 1955, Washington Office file K1815, Washington National Records Center (WNRC), Suitland, Md.

To address the problem, he established that month a Committee on Interpretive Standards. Roy E. Appleman, Carroll A. Burroughs, Donald J. Erskine, and Gunnar O. Fagerlund composed the committee, Appleman serving as chairman.[4]

The committee studied park interpretation for more than two years, submitting its report in May 1962. It found an absence of standards for interpretive activities--no clear measurements for their success or failure--and thus a great disparity in quality among parks. Museum exhibits had become stereotyped; there was need to vary their design, simplify labels, and expand the use of new techniques. The quality of seasonal interpreters was lacking. Interpretive training was described as "generally either inadequate or altogether absent." Interpreters were not well deployed: it was too easy to visit the larger parks and not find any. A fundamental shortcoming was insufficient control and monitoring by Washington and regional officials and park superintendents; a system of rigorous inspections by Washington and regional personnel with access to line authority was called for.[5]

The committee's report was not well received by management. "Connie [Wirth] gave it to the regional directors to read over one weekend," recalled Daniel B. Beard, Lee's successor as chief of interpretation. "They were afraid it would get out and be used against the Service. [Assistant Director] Jack Price...was scared silly. I don't remember

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[4]Lee, "What's New in Interpretation," paper for Visitor Services Conference, Williamsburg, Va., Dec. 2, 1959, Interpretive Programs file, History Division; "Report of Committee on Interpretive Standards," May 1962, NPSHC.

[5]"Report of Committee on Interpretive Standards," pp. 4, 8, 12, 39, 138.

that Jack Price was told to destroy the whole lot, but somebody did."[6]

Appleman pressed Price to release or permit further work on the report, without success. Some of his committee's recommendations were ultimately reflected in a memorandum from Wirth to the regional directors the following February. Among them: each park would have its program appraised by a regional staff interpreter annually and by a Washington staff interpreter every three years; "each park should afford each visitor the opportunity of having at least one contact with a uniformed Service representative"; campfire program speakers were to be upgraded; women were to be used more as interpreters; the training bulletins Conducted Trips, Talks, Campfire Programs, and Information Please were to be used more effectively.[7] Steps were soon taken to improve museum design and training as well.

Personal interpretation continued to suffer criticism, however. Robert G. Johnsson, who came to the Division of Planning and Interpretive Services in 1968, wrote a year later of the prevailing sentiment upon his arrival and since: "The feeling at the time was that personally conducted interpretation had not shared in the general improvement and advances made in our audiovisual efforts, museums, and publications. On the contrary, the opinion was, and remains, that the quality of personal interpretation is slipping and is in serious need of attention."[8]

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[6]Letter, Beard to S. Herbert Evison, Oct. 2, 1973, NPSHC. (At least one copy escaped destruction--that now in the National Park Service History Collection.)

[7]Memorandum, Appleman to Price, Nov. 14, 1962, NPSHC; Memorandum, Wirth to All Regional Directors, "Improvement of Interpretation in the National Park Service," Feb. 26, 1963, ibid.

[8]Johnsson, "A Prospectus of Projects for Inclusion in the Environmental Education Task Force," Nov. 27, 1969, NPSHC.

The opinion was confirmed in a 1973 study of personal interpretation in the Pacific Northwest Region. In the parks he surveyed there Paul H. Risk of the Department of Park and Recreation Resources, Michigan State University, found poor communications skills, poor morale, lack of employee understanding of Service goals, insufficient training, recruitment and rehire of incompetent seasonals, and inexperienced supervisors. "[O]bserved interpretation represented an average which was just adequate to slightly below," he reported. "There were no programs in the excellent category, a few very good, some adequate, some poor and a few of the worst ever witnessed anywhere."[9]

The Secretary of the Interior's Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments had already expressed its concern about the situation in a 1972 report. "We must conclude generally...that interpretive positions, facilities, and performance are at a low point for recent decades...," it declared. "On a piecemeal basis, interpretation appears to have suffered most in the competition between programs for inadequate budgets and from personnel restrictions of recent years." Citing this report, Director Hartzog detailed Bill Everhart to make another Servicewide study of interpretation.[10]

Everhart formed a steering committee of Pete Shedd; Tommy Gilbert, chief of the Office of Environmental Interpretation; and Tom Thomas, supervisor of the Mather Training Center. They and regional representatives developed a questionnaire to identify problem areas and solicit

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[9]Risk, "Assessment and Enrichment of Environmental Interpretive Services in National Park Service Areas of the Pacific Northwest Region," 1973, NPSHC.

[10]Memorandum, Hartzog to Directorate and All Field Directors, July 10, 1972 (containing Advisory Board quotation), NPSHC.

recommendations. Nearly a thousand employees completed and returned it.

By a wide margin, the respondents agreed that there had been a decline in the importance and professionalism of interpretation in the Service. The decline was attributed to several factors. Among the most significant: organizational changes that had lumped interpretation with resources management in many parks, often removing people with interpretive backgrounds from leadership; the de-professionalizing tendency of the new park technician series; increased park visitation and expansion of the National Park System without commensurate funding and personnel increases for interpretation; and increased emphasis on law enforcement after a 1970 disturbance in Yosemite, at the expense of interpretive positions and training.[11]

The Field Operations Study Team (FOST) of the late 1960s had brought about the organizational and position classification changes now perceived as adverse. Under the FOST concept, chief interpreters in the larger parks were made staff to their superintendents and no longer supervised front-line interpreters. "In most situations he won't be doing much interpretation himself," the NPS Interpreters' Newsletter had said of the chief in his new role. "He will be the truly professional interpreter, unencumbered by the need to respond to daily operational problems...."[12] Most front-line interpreters were placed in the sub-professional GS-026 park technician series under district managers responsible for both interpretation and resources management--often rangers without interpretive backgrounds. College degrees in natural science, history, or anthropology

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[11]Everhart, "A Report on National Park Service Interpretation," March 1973, NPSHC.

[12]March 1970, p. 8.

were not required for technicians; communications skills were judged more important than disciplinary expertise. Higher-level interpreters occupied the GS-025 park ranger series and became "rangers"; the titles of park naturalist, park historian, and park archeologist were officially abolished. "When, as a result of the technician program, the interpreter received the title of park ranger, he had some cause to believe that knowledge in depth of his subject matter no longer was considered essential," Everhart reported.[13]

The assignment of most interpretive duties to technicians, who could rise no higher than GS-9, was accompanied by a large loss of professional interpretive positions. The GS-025 series was primarily a career ladder for managers, not interpretive specialists. For those in the series who sought to stay in interpretation, there was less chance for advancement.

During the same period, opportunities for field interpreters to become involved with research, interpretive planning, and media production were largely withdrawn as these professional functions were placed elsewhere. Previously, a long-range planning group had rediscovered the old problem of research interfering with interpretation (see pages 24-25); its 1964 report, Road to the Future, called for "conduct of programs by professional interpreters...with full-time responsibility for planning and executing interpretive programs." After George Hartzog paid an unannounced visit to Minute Man National Historical Park in late 1965 and found a historian there engaged in open-ended research, responsibility for most historical research activity was pulled from the parks and assigned to the chief historian's office in Washington. Biological

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13"Report on National Park Service Interpretation," p. 24.

research had previously been a major duty of park naturalists; during the 1960s it was shifted to professional biologists reporting to the newly established chief scientist's office. When the Harpers Ferry Center was activated in 1970, a memorandum to the field had proscribed local production of exhibits and audiovisual programs. Such productions had sometimes been amateurish, but the directive dampened field initiative and wounded morale. "Few policy statements have stimulated such bitter opposition," Everhart found.[14]

Since the reorganization of the Washington office in 1970, there was no division or branch there identified with interpretation. There was a similar diffusion of responsibility in the regional offices, the regional chiefs of interpretation having been abolished soon afterward. Everhart's report, issued in March 1973, called for "an identifiable center of decisions and authority, both at the regional and Washington level, with responsibility to insure that all interpretive activities are directed toward accomplishing the mission of NPS."[15] This recommendation was carried out in Washington later that year with reestablishment of the assistant director for interpretation position. But interpretation was downgraded to division status in 1976 and again fell off the Washington organization chart altogether in 1983, when it was lumped with several other functions under the Visitor Services Division.

Another of Everhart's recommendations was to "place responsibility

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[14]Road to the Future: Long Range Objectives and Goals for the National Park Service (Washington: National Park Service, 1964), p. 33; telephone conversation with Robert M. Utley, Jan. 7, 1986; letter, William W. Dunmire to Edwin C. Bearss and Barry Mackintosh, Feb. 13, 1986; "Report on National Park Service Interpretation," p. 23.

[15]"Report on National Park Service Interpretation," pp. 47, 57.

for the quality and substance of the interpretive program with the park superintendent; establish as a staffing goal a professional interpreter in each park; give line authority over the interpretive program to the park interpreter." In June 1974 Associate Director John E. Cook told the regional directors that each park should have at least one professional interpreter in line authority, meaning that the interpretation and resources management combination would be abolished except in very small or special-situation areas.[16] But many parks continued to operate with the "I&RM" organization.

Between 1970 and 1974 there was a 73 percent increase in attendance on conducted tours, a 103 percent increase in the average number of visitors per tour, and a 134 percent increase in attendance at interpretive demonstrations. At the same time the number of permanent interpreters in the parks rose from 525 to 600, a 14 percent increase. "Authorized increases in numbers of seasonal interpreters and greater reliance on volunteer interpreters through the Volunteers-in-Parks program have been insufficient to meet accelerating demands for interpretive services," Bill Dunmire reported in 1975. "Gross overcrowding at these presentations is the rule, and supervision by permanent interpreters has become increasingly inadequate, resulting in a deteriorating quality of the presentations."[17]

That year interpretive services were cut for budgetary reasons--a discouraging development after the recent attention focused on interpretation, but hardly unprecedented. "Interpretation is always vulnerable

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[16]Ibid., p. 59; memorandum, Cook to Field Directorate, June 6, 1974, Washington Office file K1815, WNRC.

[17]"Report on Interpretation," NPSHC.

during budget crunches, because de-emphasis in interpretive services does not have the striking effect upon visitors that closing a restaurant, a campground, or a gas station would have," Everhart had noted in his report.[18] And as the quality of personal services had fallen, there was probably less reluctance to cut them.

In 1976 a distinguished state park administrator, William Penn Mott, Jr., of California, expressed his concern about the contemporary thrust of interpretation:

> Interpretation must be taken out of the realm of entertainment. It must become the serious business of education. I am not suggesting that we eliminate entertainment, but all too often interpretive programs have as their primary objective entertaining people. Entertainment should not be the end product, but should be a means toward the end product, which should be education.[19]

Responding to scrutiny from interested congressional committees, the Service held a conference on cultural resource preservation and interpretation problems at Harpers Ferry in January 1979. The conference report reiterated complaints often heard during the decade:

> The Service is receiving active criticism of its interpreters in historical and archeological areas. Knowledgeable people have been critical of living history programs, both as to accuracy and appropriateness. Others have pointed out misinformation being disseminated and the lack of depth in knowledge by interpreters of the park story.
>
> Some parks emphasize secondary interpretive themes and neglect or give short shrift to the park's primary theme. Often the park uses expensive and complex technological visual devices requiring technicians to maintain to interpret a relatively simple park story that could be more effectively told with less complex devices or through personal interpretation....
>
> Many of the problems in park interpretation can be traced to the adoption of the communication-over-content concept, whereby the Service decided that an interpreter did not need knowledge, but

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[18]"Report on National Park Service Interpretation," p. 17.

[19]Mott, "An Administrator Looks at Interpretation," The Interpreter 8 (1976): 6.

rather needed communication skills....[20]

The conference recommended "the identification, recruitment and career development of interpreters with academic backgrounds in American history"; subject matter training for interpreters in need of it; reallocation of funds from programs portraying minor themes to those portraying major themes; critical reevaluation of "complex media programs, the furnishing of historic structures, and other such costly efforts"; and the assignment of a historian to the Division of Interpretation in Washington to provide policy guidance and monitor historical publications and programs throughout the Service.[21]

In 1980 another study by Paul H. Risk blasted personal interpretation in the Service's North Atlantic Region. Conditions in the urban parks were especially bad:

> Interpreters as well as their supervisors seem at a loss to comprehend what they are there for.... Basic communications skills were glaringly lacking.... [F]ar too many of the interpreters observed were merely parroting raw information. They were all too often warm-blooded tape recorders utilizing only that portion of the brain which deals with cold facts.

Of the shift from subject matter experts to "communicators," Risk wrote:

> It has been said by some that the pendulum may have swung too far. Interpreters are entering the field able to interpret almost anything--excellent communicators--but knowing too little about any specific subject to have anything upon which to exercise their skill. In some cases this is true. But, it was certainly not an outstanding problem in the sites visited. Rather, the experience was to find many interpreters who had neither the subject matter expertise or communication ability.[22]

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[20]"Report and Recommendations, Cultural Resources Management Conference, January 8-10, 1979, at Harpers Ferry, W.Va.," History Division.

[21]Ibid. The historian position in the Interpretation Division was filled between 1980 and 1984.

[22]Risk, "Final Narrative Report, Evaluation of Interpretive Services in Thirty Selected Sites in the North Atlantic Region," 1980, pp. 6, 10-11, NPSHC.

That February Dave Dame, chief of interpretation in the Washington office, shared his view on the status of interpretation with his regional counterparts:

> We all know that interpretation has never been fully utilized, funded and supported as a major management tool. At no time is this more apparent than during a period of severe fiscal constraint like we are currently experiencing.... Somewhere along the line OMB, the Department, WASO and/or Regional management, and many park superintendents have decided that there is a lot of fluff contained in this thing called interpretation.

Dame saw the best hope for increased support in programs tied closely to resource protection, enabling interpretation to be justified to management as essential.[23]

Dame repeated this call in his 1982 paper, "The Role and Responsibility of Interpretation in the 1980's" (see pages 71-72). Like Mott, he thought that too much stress had been placed on entertainment, especially in some living history programs slightly related to park themes. Interpretive objectives were often poorly coordinated with other management objectives, indicating that interpretation was still on the periphery in many parks' operations. In transmitting Dame's paper to the field, Director Dickenson ascribed the decline of interpretation to the growth of the National Park System combined with budget cuts, position cuts, inflation, and a "series of special emphasis programs and initiatives." As a result, he wrote, "our visitors are no longer receiving either the quantity or quality of service they have a right to expect from the National Park Service."[24]

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[23]Memorandum, Dame to All Regional Chiefs, Interpretation and Visitor Services, Feb. 20, 1980, NPSHC.

[24]Memorandum, Dickenson to Regional Directors and Superintendents, Mar. 29, 1982, NPSHC.

Dickenson's complaint implied that there had once been some golden age when visitors were receiving interpretation of ideal quantity and quality. If there were, it apparently passed unremarked as such by contemporaries in the business. Interpretation seems to have been perpetually under siege, perpetually underfunded and short of personnel, perpetually missing the mark in one way or another.

It is worth noting that interpretation's greatest critics have been its practitioners. Good interpreters tend to be idealistic and articulate --qualities conducive to vocal self-analysis. Interpretation is also, by its nature, a very public activity, one in which any shortcomings are clearly apparent. Thus, even when it is doing no worse than behind-the-scenes program areas, it attracts more critical notice.

In the 1980s the criticism is doubtless influenced by the stiffer competition that park interpretation faces. Visitors to park programs once could not expect equivalent experiences elsewhere. Now there are popular television series like Nature and Nova on scientific subjects and occasional historical productions of high quality--all done with professional polish not easily matched by the park interpreter. Today's more sophisticated audience is less likely to be impressed with a merely competent performance, and those looking critically at interpretation tend to apply a higher standard of judgment. Even if park interpretation is no worse than it used to be, its position has probably fallen somewhat relative to other interpretive opportunities available to the public.

Is interpretation worse than it used to be? From recent critics, one would think so. From a historical perspective, one is less sure. It is well, in any event, that the criticism continues, stimulating that improvement for which there is always room.

APPENDIX

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UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Washington 25, D. C.

In reply refer to:
R1815 WASO-N

FO-54-53

April 23, 1953

Memorandum

To: All Field Offices

From: Director

Subject: Securing Protection and Conservation Objectives Through Interpretation

Area Operation recommendation #95 relating to interpretation as an offensive weapon in preventing intrusion and adverse use of areas administered by the Service was approved on December 18, 1952. The present memorandum defines more specifically the objectives of this recommendation, it attempts to place this protection theme in its proper perspective in relation to the interpretation of natural and historic features, and suggests ways in which this program may be put into effect.

A. BASIS FOR PRESERVATION AND PROTECTION THROUGH INTERPRETATION

The interpretive program serves the two basic objectives of the Service as defined in the Act of August 15, 1916 establishing a National Park Service. These purposes are: To provide for the enjoyment of areas administered by the Service, and to use and conserve them so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations. The first of these objectives is served directly as the interpretive program provides for the visitor the background of information necessary for his fullest understanding, enjoyment, and appreciation of these areas. It is the second of these basic objectives - conservation and protection - that is the subject of this memorandum. The interpretive program has a real obligation and opportunity, based upon law and policy, to contribute to preservation of the areas as well as to their enjoyment by the public. The present concern is the manner in which the interpretive program may serve the conservation and protection objective.

B. WAYS IN WHICH INTERPRETATION AIDS PARK CONSERVATION

1. It gives the visitor the facts of nature and history. The importance of interpretation of nature and history per se as a factor in park conservation is not to be discounted. While the primary objective is service to the visitor, park conservation is served concurrently. The process is very simple - YOU are most interested in and concerned about those things with which you are most familiar and in which you are most experienced. The park visitor is no different. Give him sufficient understanding of the features and values of parks and monuments, and lead him to identify himself with the park through his own experiences, and he then has the knowledge to understand the problems of park conservation, and a personal interest that will lead him to do his part in their proper use and conservation. In brief, the objective is: protection through appreciation, appreciation through understanding, and understanding through interpretation.

2. It gives the visitor some guiding principles of park management. Interpretations of facts are usually patterned by previous knowledge, or prejudices. A forest scene may suggest lumbering quite as readily as forest recreation. To lead the visitor into an interest in and an understanding of park objectives, as contrasted with other perhaps more familiar patterns of thinking about land resources and use, he must be given a background of park philosophy as well as a background of natural history. The origin and growth of the national park idea; the principles, policies, and objectives of national park use; some of the obstacles encountered in attaining those objectives; how a park is managed; and the source of authority and resources for that management - all of these are part of the background of national parks and monuments that the visitor must have for full understanding. Interpretation provides the facts of natural history and history, but is not complete until it relates those facts to the use and conservation objectives of parks and monuments.

3. It points out specific ways in which the visitor should participate, to his own greater benefit, in proper park use and conservation. The application of general principles to specific situations is not easy for most people. They approve of the principle that it is fine to have bear and deer in their natural environment, but do not see that hand-feeding of the animals is a violation of that very principle. The visitor often requires some specific instructions regarding his own behavior. Fire prevention, proper relationship of man and wildlife, protection of geyser

and cave formations, cleanliness of camp, trail, and roadside, and good and safe outdoor behavior, are among the things that can be treated directly, using specific examples, in the interpretive program. Officials of each area will need to survey their own program and problems to determine which matters of this kind need to be and can feasibly be presented. In this, as in all else, the visitor should be given, not an admonition, a warning, or a mere statement of rule or regulation, but a clear relation of the matter to the facts of natural history. Tell him why! If you convince him of the soundness of your reasons, he will be more likely to comply.

4. It uses examples from the park and its environs to illustrate lessons in park use and conservation. Facts are truths, principles are guides, but an interpretation is a pattern of thought, an hypothesis. Demonstrate by example that the pattern is sound. Following are examples of demonstrable situations.

(a) Predator control has resulted in injury to game and ranges.

(b) Once overgrazed, Yakima Park has not fully recovered in 35 years.

(c) Olympic and Rainier stand in sharp contrast to the deteriorated scenic quality of surrounding cutover areas.

(d) Wilderness and wildlife resources of Glacier National Park are values which must be accounted for in determining costs of dams on the North Fork.

(e) Sequoia, Kings Canyon, and Yosemite watersheds as they exist today are indispensible to San Joaquin Valley economy.

(f) Flood and silt from Green River adversely affect Mammoth Cave.

(g) Hetch Hetchy Valley is badly needed for recreational use today, but is unavailable.

(h) Grasslands of Mesa Verde, Big Bend, Wind Cave, and Petrified Forest are reference plots, invaluable in the study of the restoration of neighboring range lands.

These are but a few of the illustrations, drawn from the park scene, easily appreciated by the visitor, that can be used to dramatize and to give purpose to the principles of park use and conservation.

5. It identifies major continuing threats to park integrity. In the long run, park protection will not be accomplished merely by enlisting the cooperation of the park visitors while they are in the areas. Fires can be controlled, meadows restored, formations guarded, and ruins stabilized, and yet park values may be lost through encroachment from the outside. The park visitor, a citizen and part owner of the System, has the right to know that what he values and enjoys today can be lost to him, and he has the right to know how this can come about. Dams, power developments, lumbering, grazing, hunting, mining encroachments and the like are a continuing danger to the whole national park idea. There are always existing threats of such encroachments. Alternates, involving proper use of non-Service lands, usually exist. Service officials should be informed on these matters so that the facts may be presented as occasions arise.

The interpretive program, as a rule, cannot deal with each threatened encroachment in detail, but it is proper, and perhaps even an obligation, that the interpretive program identify in appropriate ways current threats. This can be done without argument, without stating conclusions, and without making strong recommendations. If the interpretive program prepares the ground by developing an interest and knowledge of park values and an awareness and appreciation of park objectives, it can be anticipated that the visitor will himself react favorably to information on existing threats of encroachment.

C. PLANNING THE CONSERVATION ASPECTS OF AN INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM

Some of the aspects of the program outlined herein are now in effect in the field. There are many gaps, however, and what is done is largely without coordinated direction. Following are some suggestions that may be helpful in analyzing and giving force and direction to such a program in an area:

1. Survey the possibilities. What general principles, policies, and objectives best fit into the local area interpretive theme? What specific park use or conservation problems of local importance can be pointed out? What object lessons from the area can be used to illustrate problems of

land use or conservation? What dangers of encroachment to this or other Service areas can be identified concurrently with the local area interpretation?

These questions will suggest those items which should be planned for coverage in the interpretive program. Specific items, falling logically within the scope of the area interpretive theme, are preferable to an attempt at broad, general, all-inclusive coverage.

2. Plan the method of treatment. Just as a balanced interpretation of natural and human history is planned, plan also how, when, and where each phase of the conservation theme defined above will be handled. Which items can be presented as a part of the existing talk or guided trip program? Do any of the items suggest exhibit treatment? Do existing exhibit labels identify the facts of conservation? Do the area publications treat of the protection or conservation of the specific subject discussed? The answers to these questions will suggest the place of each conservation item in the area interpretive program.

3. Assign responsibility. Tie the conservation items to specific activity assignments. A talk on wildlife, for example, is a logical place to explain wildlife policy. Make this phase of conservation, then, a definite part of a wildlife lecture assignment, or of a bird walk. There is one very important factor to consider in making such assignments. More than in any other phase of planning, the varied capabilities of the interpreters must be considered. Most men can relate park history and development, most can outline general park objectives, and can make specific mention of local protection and park use problems. Greater experience and background is required to effectively interpret the local land use and conservation case histories, but the greatest care must be exercised in making assignments in which there is a possibility of misinterpretation of Service policy, practice, or intent, or of attitudes and relationships with industry or other agencies. Comparatively few seasonally employed interpreters may be judged sufficiently experienced and grounded in park policy, and of sufficient skill and tact to venture into this broader field. Be fully aware of the capabilities of each interpreter, and never exceed their limitations in your assignments or expectations.

D. SOME CAUTIONS AND ADVICE

1. The interpretive program deals in the facts of natural and human history. The interpretation of the park scene is still the basic job. Interpret the natural or historic scene, but give that interpretation a conservation implication. Make the facts of nature and history tell the conservation story, but keep the conservation theme in balance with the interpretation of natural and human history.

2. Conservation interpretation invites logical reasoning. Do not preach, lecture, argue, editorialize, or labor to convince, and do not overdramatize. Casual and simple statement of facts and principles, presented naturally, simply, and positively, is effective, but a labored effort to convince will defeat the purpose. Avoid personal opinion, but make the facts of natural history point to their own conclusion.

3. Conservation interpretation is brief and specific. Select a few points, a few examples, and stress these, and let the entire conservation treatment occupy but an exceedingly small part of any presentation. A few planned words at the right time are sufficient.

4. Conservation interpretation is fair. Avoid criticisms of industry or of other agencies, and do not purposely disregard facts that may not be favorable. Dams, power developments, irrigation systems, lumber, minerals, and grass are all required by modern civilization. Recognize that such development and use is necessary, and that other agencies function quite properly in the fields of such use and development. At the same time emphasize that the national parks and monuments are not the proper places for that type of land use. Lumbering, power developments, mining, grazing, and the like are foreign to the entire use concept of national parks and monuments, and are activities which have the power to completely nullify recreational and inspirational values of these areas.

5. The conservation interpretation objective is a simple one. That objective is: to give the visitor a personal knowledge of park and monument values, such an appreciation of park principles and objectives, and such an awareness of his own responsibility, that he may take intelligent action, whether it concerns his own behavior in the parks, or whether it involves other action after he leaves. Every citizen must formulate his own conclusions on conservation matters, but he is entitled to know the facts, principles, and specific situations affecting conservation as they may be observed and interpreted in a national park or monument.

Conrad L. Wirth

Director

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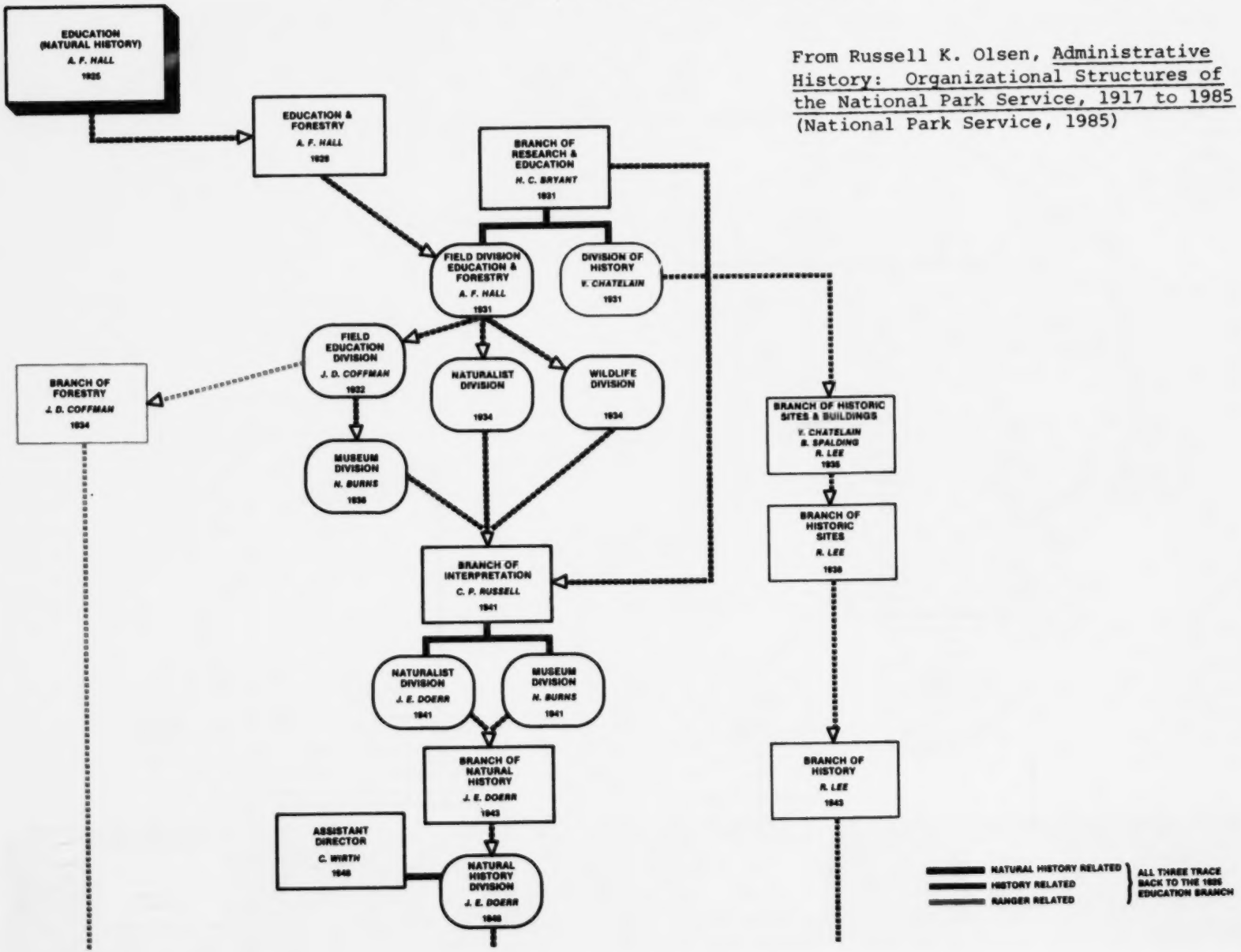
THE NATURALIST, RANGER & HISTORIAN LINE

From Russell K. Olsen, Administrative History: Organizational Structures of the National Park Service, 1917 to 1985 (National Park Service, 1985)



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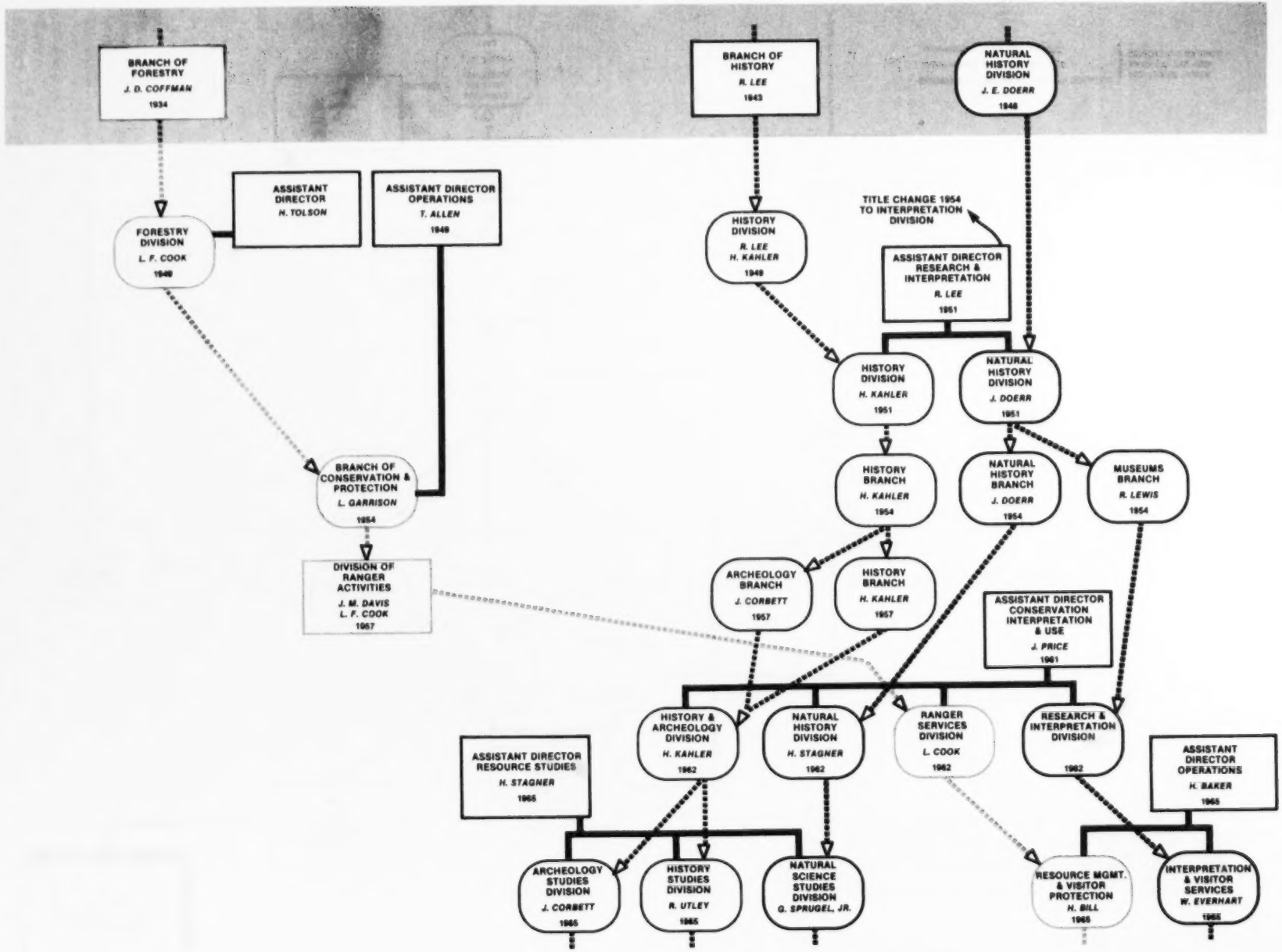

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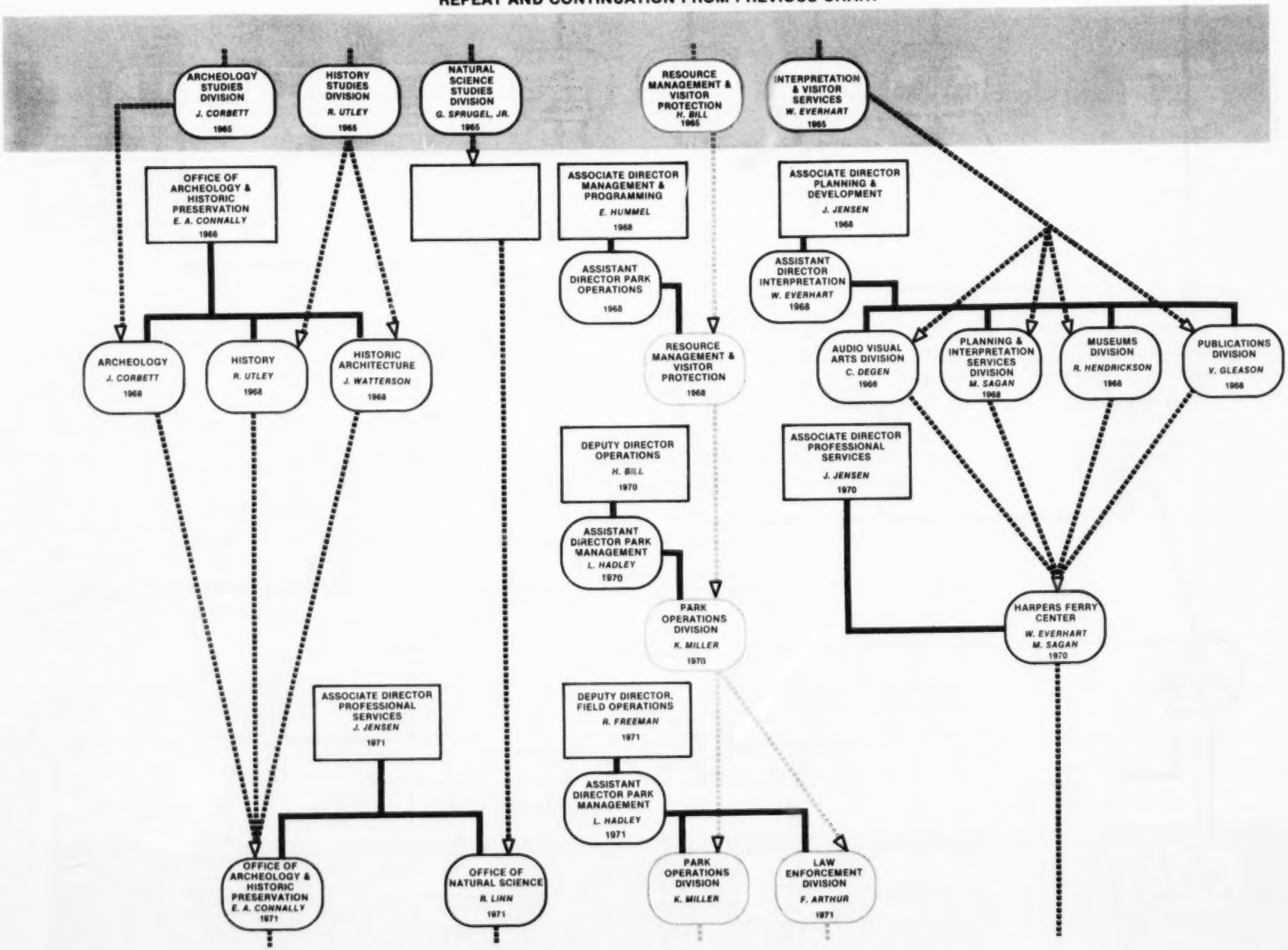

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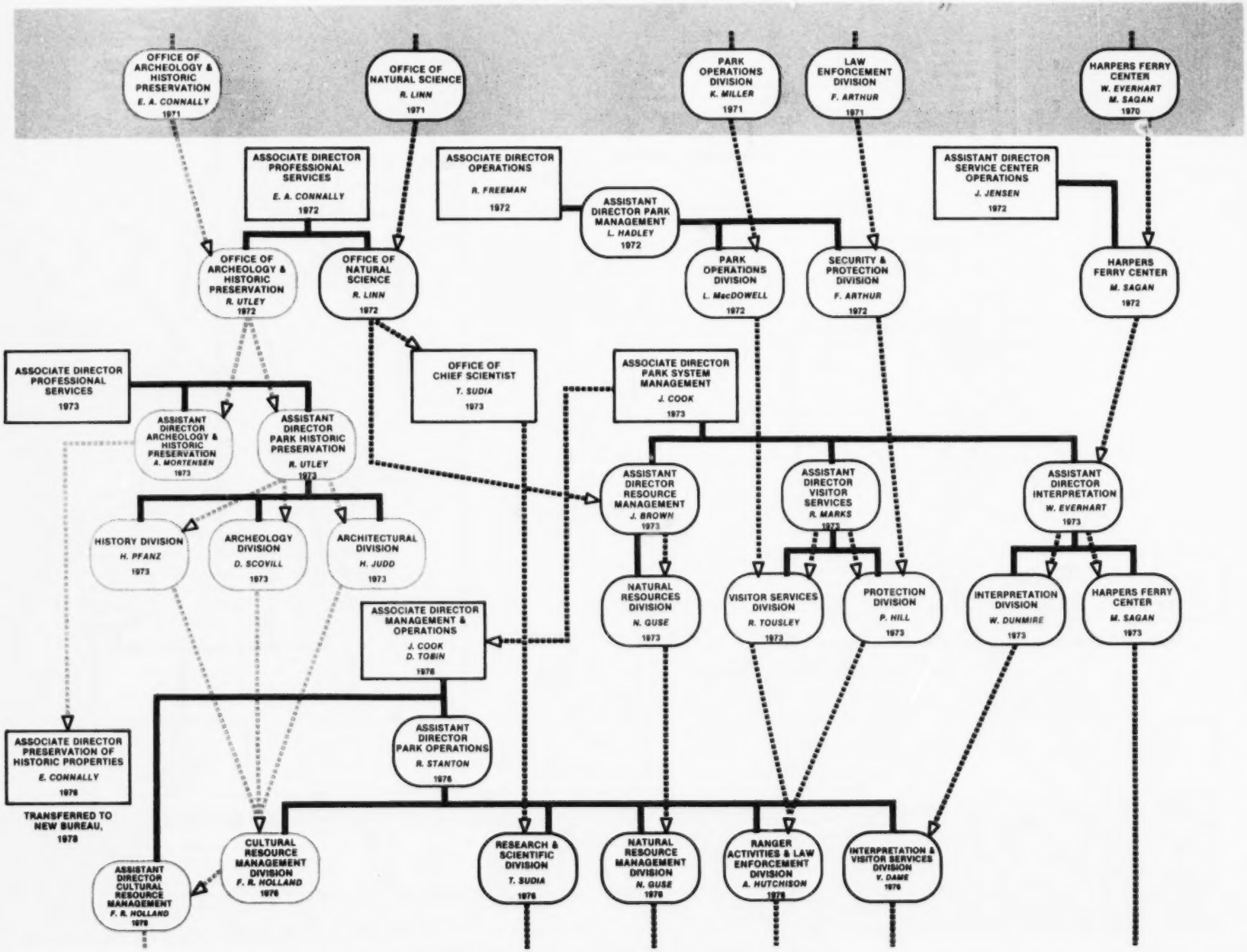

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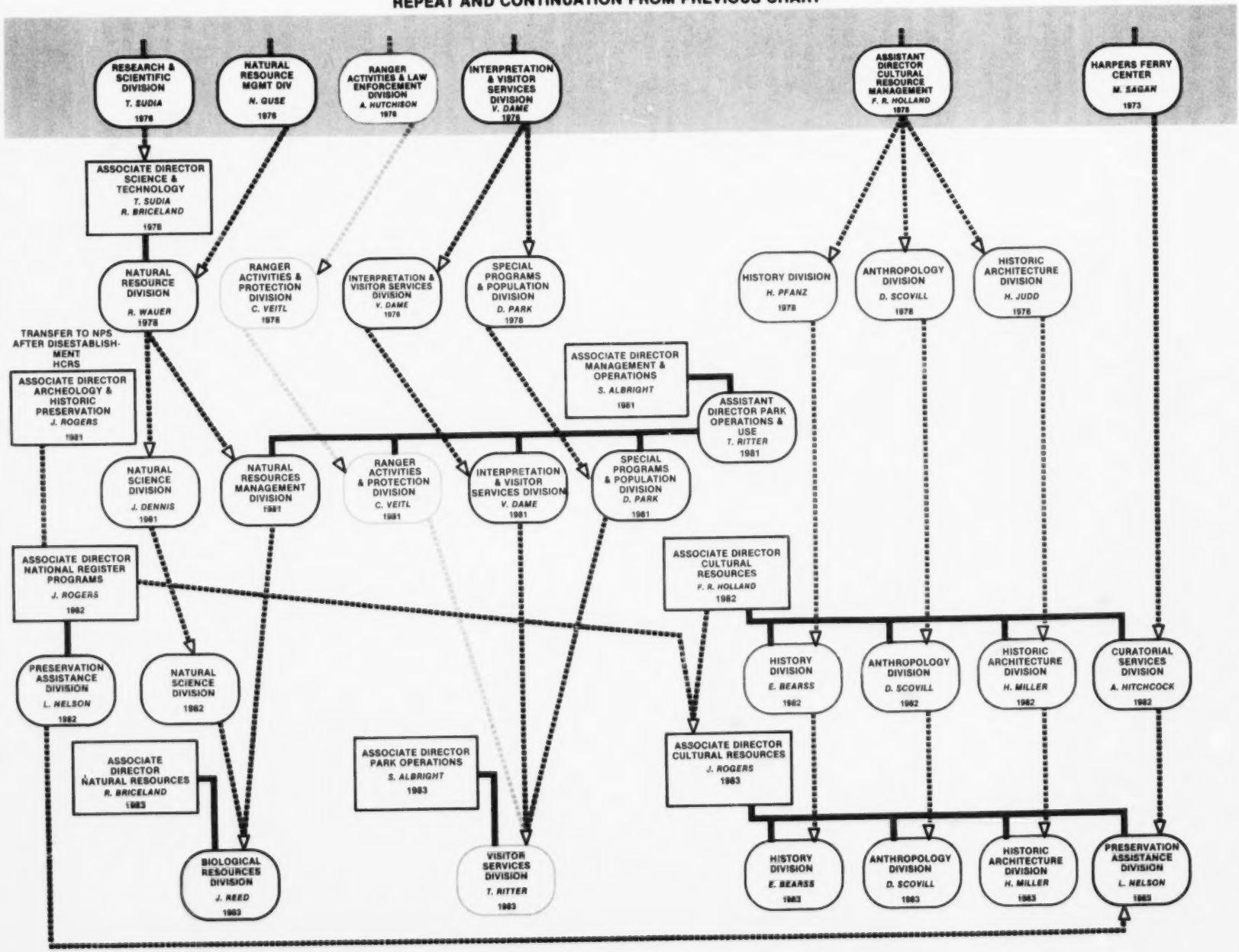

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ILLUSTRATIONS

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Archeologist J. Walter Fewkes outside ranger station converted to museum, Mesa Verde National Park, 1916.

New museum at Mesa Verde built 1923-1925; 1929 photo.

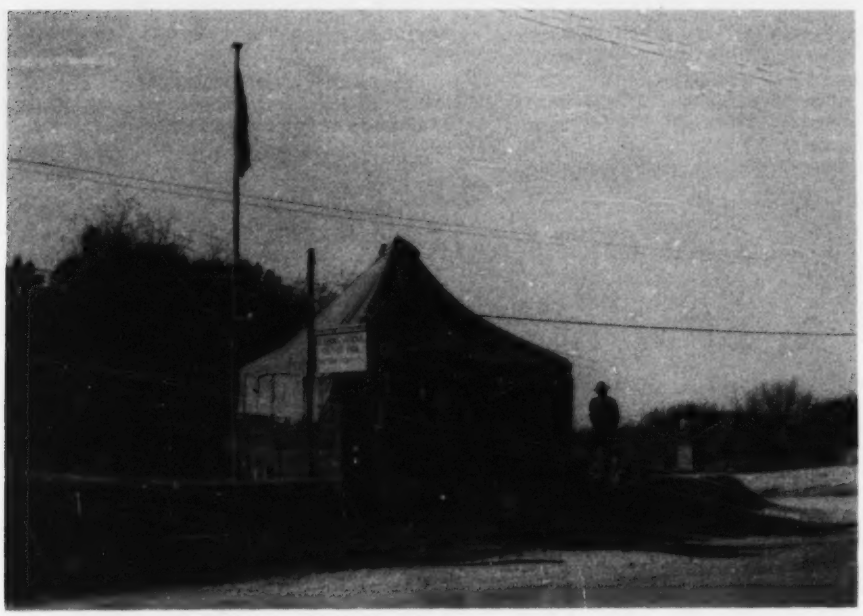
Director Horace M. Albright at dedication of Memorial Mansion, George Washington Birthplace National Monument, May 14, 1932.

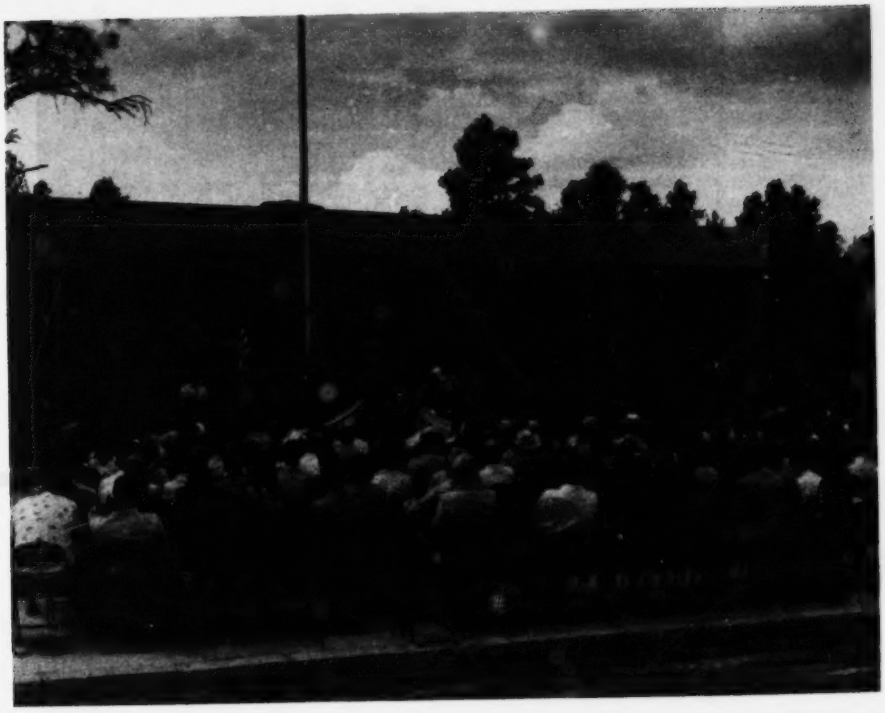
NPS officials with Educational Advisory Board, Feb. 27, 1933. Left to right sitting: Harold C. Bryant, Waldo G. Leland, Hermon C. Bumpus, Frank R. Oastler, Horace M. Albright, W.W. Campbell; standing: Verne E. Chatelain, Earl A. Trager, Laurence Vail Coleman.

Two generations of outdoor exhibits--above: Obsidian Cliff "shrine" at Yellowstone National Park, built 1931 (1936 photo); below: orientation panels at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania County Battlefields Memorial National Military Park, c. 1965.

Exhibit preparation--above: model laboratory at Fort Hunt, Virginia, c. 1935; below: Edward J. Bierly completing panel for Everglades National Park, 1957.

Temporary interpretive facilities--above: campground museum at Glacier National Park, 1932; below: entrance station at Vicksburg National Military Park with staff ready to lead auto caravan tours, 1934.





MISSION 66 interpretive facility dedications--above: Grand Canyon National Park visitor center, June 29, 1957; below: Mount Rushmore National Memorial amphitheater, August 25, 1957.

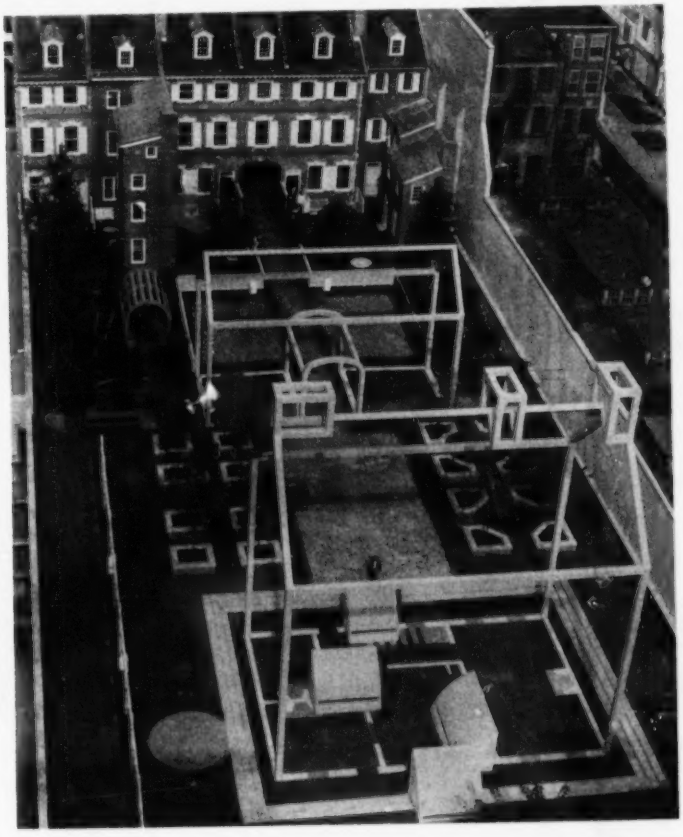
The Harpers Ferry infrastructure--above: Conrad L. Wirth, George B. Hartzog, Jr., and Bertha Mather McPherson, daughter of Stephen T. Mather, cut ribbon at Wirth Hall, home of Mather Training Center, April 17, 1964; below: Rep. Harley O. Staggers, Sen. Jennings Randolph, William C. Everhart, Secretary Stewart L. Udall, and Sen. Robert C. Byrd view Interpretive Design Center model, September 21, 1967.

Freeman Tilden in Rock Creek Park, 1969.

NEED program activity in Prince William Forest Park, 1968.

Living history--above: Musket firing at Morristown National Historical Park, 1973 (reconstructed soldiers' huts in background); below: cooking in reconstructed slave cabin, Booker T. Washington National Monument, 1974.

Interpretive innovations: Historian George E. Davidson of Edison National Historic Site with his mobile interpretive unit, a converted mail van, 1971; "ghost" reconstructions at Franklin Court, Independence National Historical Park, 1975.



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